

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

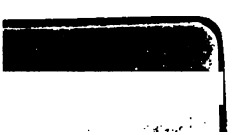
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`




600055916W



AGATHA BEAUFORT;

OR,

FAMILY PRIDE.

AGATHA BEAUFORT;

OR,

FAMILY PRIDE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PIQUE."

Her name was Beauty—of a skin
Ne swarte, ne browne—this fair ladye
Like Luna shone, outglittering
The stars—so she all rivalrie.

Rommant de la Rose.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., 65 CORNHILL.

1852.

349. w. 352.

Printed by Oliver & Boyd,
Tweeddale Court, High Street, Edinburgh.

AGATHA BEAUFORT;

OR,

FAMILY PRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

FEW parts of England excel the midland county of W——shire in picturesque beauty, or present to the tourist's eye such agreeable diversity of landscape. The district also claims historical interest of no common description; for its castles, churches, woods, and hills, are all associated with the history of the past. Almost every span of ground recalls visions of royal pageants, and magnificent cavalcades of olden times, when many of the monarchs of England made its woodlands echo to the shrill note of the huntsman's bugle; or, again, of the days when the air resounded with the martial din of war, as armies in gallant array advanced to the assault of those

proud fortresses, whose giant ruins still remain in their stately beauty, memorials of the wealth and power of their princely founders.

To this day the county is rich in spacious, curious old mansions, constructed with those quaint contrivances, to combine comfort with magnificence, which distinguish the domestic architecture of the Marian and Elizabethan periods. Most of these venerable mansions have been handed down in direct succession to their present owners, from ancestors who mingled in the busy scenes of feudal pomp and splendour; many of whom, likewise, found a glorious death, fighting bravely for church, state, or king, in one or other of the bloody feuds which, at divers periods of our history, converted the length and breadth of this fair realm into one huge battle-field.

Such, at least, is the solemn testimony borne by many a church in the county. Scarcely can one be entered, however humble, without feeling that there the startling reality of the message proclaiming man's frailty, and the nothingness of worldly grandeur, strikes home with peculiar awe, as the eye rests on the lordly banners and escutcheons that adorn its walls; while soon, from these faded relics of human greatness, the glance falls on

the gorgeous tomb beneath, with its mailed effigy, under which repose the remains of that potent warrior whose valour won the trophies drearily shadowing his last resting-place.

Claiming thus, as children of her soil, some of the highest and most ancient families of that illustrious commonage, at once the pride and boast of England, the memories of olden days cling with strange tenacity to the county of W———shire. Gleams of the old faith—relics of priestly tyranny and dark superstition, long since swept away—haunt her beautiful valleys. More than one noble mansion there, has still its Romish chapel attached, fair and imposing to behold in external pomp and decoration; and the sound of the convent vesper-bell oft-times steals on the ear, floating in musical cadence on the bosom of the soft breeze, as daylight fades away, blending in shadowy hues the outlines of the distant hills.

In one of the sunniest and most lovely dells in this fairest of counties lay the little secluded village of Woodthorpe. From early spring until the sear hand of autumn cast a many-coloured mantle over the leaves and verdure, its vales and meadows were enamelled with fragrant wild flowers: wood ane-

mones, violets, primroses, cowslips, showy field-poppies, and woodbines, followed each other in rapid and brilliant succession. Then the wild luxuriance of its thickets of hawthorn and eglantine, showering a profusion of pink and white blossoms on the green banks beneath, was refreshing to behold. The small gardens, also, attached to the cottages, were models of trim neatness, and formed a gay border on either side of the village street; while roses and clematis twined in graceful festoons over the porches and roofs, until during the summer season the little village appeared literally embowered in sweets.

The population of Woodthorpe amounted to about two hundred persons, most of whom were in tolerably easy circumstances in life; either farming on their own account, or labourers in daily employ on the estate of Sir James Somerton, owner of the village and the adjoining land for several miles around it. Woodthorpe Park was one of those magnificent residences seen only in England, and there even rarely. The mansion, stately, and of enormous extent, remained with its dark grey stone untouched by stucco, or modern improvement of any kind, embosomed in woods, the growth of centuries. No

daring hand had been suffered unduly to lop away, or fetter within the bounds of formal trimness, the luxuriant vegetation which reigned everywhere throughout the park. Nature there followed her own devices; consequently, no park in the kingdom could boast of richer woodland scenery, shadier groves; or brighter expanses of greensward, than that of Woodthorpe.

The village lay about a mile from the mansion, almost, in fact, comprehended within the limits of the park; for tall avenues of trees extended beyond the iron gates opening on the green; while the church and neat parsonage stood actually within its precincts. Rows of oaks and sycamores skirted the village street; and for some two miles along the high road, park palings and dark woods imparted to the scenery an air of sombre grandeur and seclusion; while every now and then sudden breaks in the line of trees revealed glimpses of the park beyond, with its numerous herds of deer browsing in the sunshine, or basking in clusters on the soft turf.

Woodthorpe, however, so rich in every sylvan beauty, was seldom visited by Sir James Somerton. A yearly brief sojourn of a few weeks generally com-

prised the entire period he honoured the place with his presence; the principal reason which prevented Sir James's longer residence being, that his wife Lady Mary Somerton's health was in so delicate and precarious a condition that she seldom quitted London, as her ladyship was sure to fancy herself ill if absent for any length of time from her favourite medical attendant.

Lady Mary had brought her husband an only son. Mr Somerton, at the time this story opens, had completed his twenty-seventh year, and was better known among his father's tenantry at Woodthorpe than the baronet himself. Universally beloved, Mr Somerton was the very personage to keep up there the *prestige* and dignity of his family. Just and liberal, no man had ever been heard to arraign his decisions, or to question his generosity. Foremost in every scheme for improving the condition and promoting the prosperity of his humbler neighbours, Mr Somerton led not a life of selfish ease or haughty seclusion; yet, while mingling freely and constantly with all, and making himself acquainted with the wants and necessities of the poorest labourer on his father's estates, he forfeited, by this condescension, no distinction due to his rank; for none, presuming on his affability, ventured to trespass, by

freedom of remark or otherwise, on that respectful deference owing to the lord of the soil from his dependants. Yet, with a disposition thus far removed from pride, there was a calm dignity in Mr Somerton's deportment, and in all he said or did a quiet determination, which told upon people wonderfully. His dependants considered his word as infallible; for, while others exhausted themselves in noisy argument and vague promises, what Mr Somerton said was to be accomplished, they fearlessly relied upon his power to effect. The influence, therefore, this confidence in his steady ability gave him over them was incalculable, and redounded to the great and permanent prosperity of the community.

In disposition Mr Somerton was reserved: though he had read much, and thought more, he never made useless parade of his knowledge. An eloquent orator, he possessed that power of concentration of thought, and ready wit, which, while exercising unbounded sway over the mind and opinions of those with whom he was brought into constant intercourse, won him a prominent position in the senate. From the evening, therefore, on which his brilliant maiden speech was received with admiring applause, his influence over public affairs

had been progressive and sure. In general society, however, Mr Somerton talked little. Lounging nonchalantly aloof, save for the flash which every now and then shot from his dark eye, or the smile which occasionally curled his well-cut lip, he might have been deemed an abstracted spectator of what was going on around; yet, when Mr Somerton did think it worth while to speak, immediate and general was the attention his words commanded.

On the village green, exactly opposite to the gates of Woodthorpe Park, stood an old grey stone house, of considerable dimensions. A neat, formal little garden in front was sheltered from the road by a row of tall elm trees, clipped and trimmed with the nicest precision. A deep, clear pool of water lay on one side of the house, from whence it derived its name of "Pool House;" on the other, an enormous farm-yard stretched for some distance down the adjoining lane. Pool House was the abode of Mr Compton, Sir James's principal tenant at Woodthorpe, whose honourable boast it was, that, though holding the farm at a rental of many hundreds a year, he had never been once in arrears with his rent; nor had the baronet's steward, in his stated perambulations over the property, ever had

cause to utter the slightest complaint as to the culture or management of the land.

Proceeding down the shady lane leading from the village green, close under the prosperous farmer's garden wall, a quarter of an hour's walk brings you to another house, standing far back in a field, on the opposite side of the road to Mr Compton's. This was the residence of Mr Desmond, a comparatively new resident in the village. The house was a small one, very prettily situated on the verge of the park, and had formerly been inhabited by Sir James's head gamekeeper. A row of linden trees led from the gate in the lane up to the garden, which was tastefully arranged; and pass whenever you might, the flowers of the various seasons bloomed gaily around, betokening, by their order, harmony, and variety of colour, that feminine industry and taste contributed to the adornment of the place. Excepting at church, Mr Desmond was rarely seen outside his own little domain; and although he had been an inhabitant of Woodthorpe for upwards of a year, he shunned and declined intercourse with every one—Mr Compton excepted, whose kindness was not to be repulsed.

Mr Desmond was a tall, grave-looking man, with lofty and slightly aquiline features. His

hair was tinged with grey; his age apparently averaged between forty and fifty; and there were few who, as they marked the indescribable something in his manners and gestures, which denoted the perfect gentleman, but felt that some unhappy combination of events must have consigned to obscurity one whose language and habits appeared so superior to his outward condition. Mr Desmond's family consisted of his wife, and an only daughter, offspring of a former marriage. Mrs Desmond was a smiling, good-natured little woman, careful, and sensitive in the highest degree of her husband's approbation, to whom she made the most devoted wife; though evidently her former station in society had been inferior to his.

For some time the secluded life the Desmonds led, and their marked avoidance of social intercourse with the village worthies, impressed people with an undefined sense of their importance. There was that, also, in the air and carriage of Mr Desmond and his daughter which repressed familiarity. Gradually, however, the fact crept out that the Desmonds were poor—poor enough to render indispensable the strictest scrutiny on the outlay of every farthing expended in their household. Some irregularities

in the discharge of the bills due to the village butcher and baker brought about this notable discovery, and at once the Desmonds' *prestige* vanished. Their mysterious retirement resolved itself into the most unromantic commonplace, and their reserve was construed into the galling restraint imposed by imperious necessity.

Poverty is the surest touchstone of worth. It strips a man of all imaginary qualifications in the estimation of others: he has no allurements of present profit or future gain to offer to his friends; the vague forethought, also, that his friendship may some day prove useful, though it would puzzle them to explain in what way—one of the secret impulses, if all hearts could be read, which induce many to covet the society of persons totally uncongenial—must likewise vanish; and if, after this pruning down of every interested and selfish motive, a man stands, it must be for some noble virtue intrinsic in himself. Despite their poverty, therefore, the Desmonds did maintain themselves in the esteem of the inhabitants of Woodthorpe; and though, on the first discovery of their very limited means, their popularity sank to zero, it speedily and swiftly rose again, notwithstanding that the romance of their seclusion had for ever vanished.

Late one evening, not very long after the needy circumstances of the family had afforded subject for village gossip, a young girl hastily quitted Mr Desmond's house, and stood in silent meditation on the gravel-walk extending along its front. It was at that hour when, under the darkening skies, all things repose in deep, dreamy silence. The breeze, which gently swayed the foliage variegated with beautiful autumnal tints, subsided into whispered murmurs; and the flowers, one by one, shut up their fragrant petals, bending under the weight of the starry dew-drops glittering like diamonds around. The gloom gradually gliding over the landscape seemed to oppress the young girl's spirit also; for there she long stood motionless, her figure slightly inclined forwards, her eyes fixed on the ground, and her hand often raised and pressed to her brow. Her bonnet hung from her arm, and the shawl that drooped from her shoulders displayed the exquisite outline of her figure and neck.

Margaret Desmond was not a beauty in the common acceptation of the term. Her face and figure did not strike with admiration at a first glance; for her features, with their faultless proportion, required study. No hasty survey could catch the varied ex-

pression of her dark blue eyes, or feel the full force of the soft persuasive eloquence contrasting at times, with the bright, gladsome animation of her glance. Shining bands of nut-brown hair, drooping low in graceful clusters of ringlets, shaded her cheek; while thick tresses, which in their luxuriancy seemed almost to defy restraint, were gathered into a heavy knot on the back of her head. Her nose was small and straight, her mouth beautifully cut, with lips round and crimson, curling with merry archness when parted by the dazzling smile which displayed her white, pearly teeth.

But as she stood there, no smile lighted her features; and the profound tranquillity which reigned around, as all things were slowly enveloped in gloom, fell not soothingly on her spirit. Her brow was painfully contracted, and restless anxiety lurked in her eyes. Occasionally, too, a tremulous motion agitated her lips, and with a slight shudder her head drooped still lower on her bosom. Presently a step sounded within the house, and a voice uttered her name.

Margaret started; then hastily putting on her bonnet, she bounded across the tiny lawn, and passing through a gate, which opened into a field

separating the cottage from the domain of Woodthorpe Park, sauntered slowly along. The path she was pursuing—the footroad from the village to an adjacent hamlet—was sheltered by a thick hedge, and formed almost a broad terrace-walk; so much higher did it lie than the rest of the field, which sloped abruptly down to the park.

Somewhat of the care that furrowed Margaret's brow vanished as the clear breeze circled round her, creeping along the summits of the lofty trees and scattering about showers of red leaves: for the cold blue skies and moist atmosphere of October had already committed sad havoc, and stripped many a stately branch of its foliage.

Rumour had not exaggerated the extent of Mr Desmond's pecuniary embarrassment; nor even, as is seldom the case, estimated nearly its magnitude. This sorrow it was that now shadowed the brow of his young daughter. Mr Desmond's was, that oft-told history of a youth of thoughtless levity and profuseness, followed by a manhood of poverty and care. In his distress, as is always the case, more there were ready to censure his past improvidence, than to minister to his present necessity. Yet Mr Desmond's friends might have spared their reproofs, for the sins of his early

days were perpetually rising against him, and proved as sorrowful a burden as their charitable anxiety for his amendment could desire. Debts, often long forgotten, pressed heavily upon him; and such was the cause of the grief and consternation which overwhelmed his family on the day our story opens. A bill of long standing, to a very considerable amount, had been presented—three days' grace and its payment, or arrest at the end of this period, awaited Mr Desmond. One hundred a-year, the fortune brought him by his first wife, and his own small retiring pension from a clerkship that he formerly held in a government office, made up the amount of Mr Desmond's income. Not a moment then was to be lost: his creditor was inexorable. But one course seemed open to him, which was to request the loan of the sum from his prosperous neighbour, Mr Compton.

Generously and unconditionally, the money was instantly tendered; but Mr Desmond insisted on giving Mr Compton his bond for its gradual repayment at an interval of six months. Thus, though the danger had been temporarily averted, Mr Desmond knew that the residue of his small income, until this sum was repaid, would be inadequate for the support of his family, even on the very limited scale of their

present expenditure; so that their only alternative seemed to be to quit their pretty, retired cottage, and wander elsewhere in search of cheaper living and deeper obscurity. Sad and earnest had been their conferences together: for one little luxury had been gradually yielded, and then another, until at length further retrenchment became impossible.

Margaret's was the voice which encouraged her father's faltering resolve; and though it was with the deepest distress that she thought of leaving Woodthorpe, and sinking still lower in the scale of social distinction, she had strength and fortitude of character not only to counsel this step, but to act up to what her conscience told her was the just and right course. Another grief, likewise, pressed heavily on Margaret's heart, and made the words with which she urged on her father the necessity of relinquishing their present home almost die upon her lips: this was the knowledge that her encouragement of the timid suit of Mr Compton's only son would for ever cancel their debt.

The respectful admiration evinced by young Compton for his daughter had long afforded much amusement to Mr Desmond; whose patrician blood, however, would have boiled indignantly could he have supposed this silent homage capable of rousing

a corresponding sentiment in Margaret's bosom. Mr Desmond rightly interpreted his daughter's feelings. No congeniality of habit or thought existed between herself and George Compton; therefore, though she respected his principles and frank honesty of character, no warmer sentiment responded, on her part, to his attachment.

Slowly and sadly Margaret pursued her solitary walk, musing on these things; feeling keenly the burden of being elevated by birth, education, and habits, above the sphere in which pecuniary circumstances restrained her. No privation can be more acutely felt than this—almost the worst of poverty's ills to endure. Without any undue presumption, Margaret felt herself a being of a different race from the people amongst whom her lot was then cast: her tastes, sympathies, and pursuits, were wide apart from theirs. Yet she knew that the enjoyment, intellectual and refined, which imagination daily pictured—that participation in the poetry of life, which wealth and position alone can give, must ever remain to her as it then was—an ideal. Miss Desmond's, however, was not a character to exhaust itself in vain lamentations and secret repinings for a higher state of happiness

and prosperity than it had pleased God to assign to her. Therefore, though occasionally a sigh escaped her lips, and momentary depression damped her spirits when she thought of her solitude, she speedily chased away such unwelcome visitants by that best of remedies—active benevolence.

At length Margaret paused, for the progress of her reverie had led her much further from home than she intended.

The moon had just risen, bathing all things in a flood of pale subdued light. From her elevated position a wide expanse of park was visible, diversified by dark broad shadows cast by gigantic trees, and by patches of moonlight brilliant enough for the scene of some nocturnal elfin revel. A large piece of water, outlined by masses of foliage, glowed with tremulous radiance in the distance, as every now and then a light cloud flitted across the moon's disc. The passive tranquillity of the scene was inexpressibly soothing to Margaret's spirit, and she stood absorbed in meditation, until the sound of a hasty step approaching made her lower her veil; but ere she could resume her homeward progress, George Compton stood beside her.

"Mrs Desmond sent me in search of you, Miss Margaret. She was alarmed at your long absence," said he, hesitatingly.

"I am sorry to have occasioned you so much trouble. Mamma need not have been alarmed, as I have not wandered beyond this footpath," replied Margaret, walking slowly forwards.

"Perhaps not. It might be only Mrs Desmond's kindness that induced her to send me, knowing that she could not confer greater happiness than by honouring me with this commission," hurriedly rejoined Mr Compton.

Involuntarily, Margaret quickened her pace, and made no rejoinder. The colour rose to the young man's brow. For some distance they walked on in mutual silence; but it was easy to perceive from the nervous impatience of his step, and the difficulty with which he restrained its impetuosity within the bounds of his companion's progress, that some unusual emotion was stirring in his mind. Had the light permitted, or perhaps had not Miss Desmond so assiduously averted her head, she would have seen the colour gather and settle in Mr Compton's cheek, and a kind of determined expression to brave the worst gradually diffuse itself over his comely good-

natured face,—symptoms which would have infallibly accelerated not a little her speed homewards.

"Miss Desmond, I have heard to-day the most distressing rumour, which I grieve to say has just now been fully confirmed by Mrs Desmond. Oh! Margaret, say that you will not leave Woodthorpe!" at length burst, in agitating accents, from Mr Compton's lips.

His tones were expressive of such genuine distress and anxiety, that Margaret could not refrain from glancing upon him more kindly than she had ever before done in her life: besides, sympathy, even from Mr Compton, was soothing to her heart.

"It must be! My father cannot afford to live longer here. We must indeed leave Woodthorpe," replied she at length, slowly and sadly.

"Nay, Miss Desmond, why should it be so? Consent to share everything my father and mother possess. They love you already as a daughter. Oh, Margaret! may I not hope that at length the most assiduous devotion may sometime induce you to gladden our home?" exclaimed Mr Compton earnestly.

He paused, and would have taken her hand.

Gently, though firmly, Margaret withheld it. Tears trembled in her eyes.

" Mr Compton, I cannot permit you to talk to me thus. It pains me inexpressibly. Believe me, I am grateful, deeply grateful, for all the kindness I have received from you and yours," replied she quickly.

A deep shade of disappointment gathered on Mr Compton's face.

" And is this all, Miss Desmond? Though we are fully alive to the disparity between your situation and that which I—*we* can offer to you, is it quite impossible, dear Margaret, that you could forget it? Will not my earnest prayer induce you to reconsider your decision?" rejoined he, at length, in a voice faltering with emotion.

" Why will you compel me, Mr Compton, to requite so ill what we owe you by persisting in this theme? I cannot accept the home you so generously offer," replied Margaret, gently, though decidedly.

Mr Compton made no reply; and for some time they walked on silently. Tears streamed down Margaret's cheeks: the future presented an aspect so joyless—so utterly devoid of hope—that a chill feeling of despondency crept over her spirits.

The clapping of a gate on the footpath some little distance before them, disturbed at length the reverie into which both Margaret and her companion had

fallen. In a few seconds, the dull sound of a horse's hoofs falling on the soft turf was distinctly audible.

"Mr Somerton!" said Mr Compton, as he took off his hat to a gentleman who at that instant passed on horseback.

Margaret hastily raised her eyes. She perceived that Mr Somerton cast a long scrutinizing gaze on herself and her companion as he passed. Suddenly he checked his horse, and brought it round towards them.

"Mr Compton, I wish to speak a few words with you—I will not detain you an instant!" said he, in a full deep voice.

George Compton immediately left her side; then Margaret, now rid of her unwelcome companion, bounded swiftly forwards: not, however, before she fancied that she caught the sound of her own name pronounced by Mr Somerton's lips. Breathless and excited she stood at the garden gate, ere Mr Compton joined her. She turned and silently offered her hand; for she could not then ask him to enter the house.

He took it, and eagerly pressed it to his lips; and so they parted.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Margaret entered her home, not a sound was stirring. The shutters of the sitting-room window were closed, and the moonlight streamed through the open garden-door, partially illumining the passage and staircase. All was cheerless and solitary: no busy footsteps resounded, or voices echoed; and Margaret, as she threw aside her bonnet and shawl, felt deeper depression steal over her spirits.

The dull murmur of voices in the adjacent parlour at length fell on her ear; and with feelings of positive relief she hastily entered the room: its sole occupants were her father and mother.

Mr Desmond was sitting in an arm-chair, with his elbow resting on the table. A reading-candle threw its strong glare on the open book before him; a paper-knife carelessly lay across its page, and Mr Desmond's eyes were averted. A deeper gravity than usual rested on his pale, thoughtful features;

and the anxious solicitude of his glance, and the restlessness of his deportment, but too surely betokened mental disquietude. Near him stood an open writing-desk; and the table was covered with letters, fragments of paper, bills paid and unpaid, and a variety of other memoranda. Opposite, at the other end of the table, Mrs Desmond sat occupied with her needle. In spite of the sorrow and anxiety of the last few days, the same placid smile shone in her good-natured face, and she bent over her work with as much composure as if no untoward event had ruffled the tranquillity of the household.

Mrs Desmond was one of those pliable, complacent persons, whose passions and desires, by some wondrous process, are almost invariably bounded within the limits of what they happen at the moment to possess. No present or future fears had power to rouse more than temporary uneasiness in her bosom; or to banish the perpetual smile which beamed on her lips. Her character resembled the polished surface of a mirror, which retains no after-vestige of the objects it has reflected; while so really impervious was she to the casualties of life, that had it been her fate to sink from the height of splendour to most abject penury, she would speedily have become reconciled

to her lot. Mrs Desmond, however, though lacking warmth and sensibility, was thoroughly just and upright in her conduct. She looked upon her husband and his daughter as prodigies of wisdom; and, in her own mind, felt not the smallest doubt that their tact and knowledge of the world would quickly rescue them from difficulty.

When Margaret entered the room, Mrs Desmond raised her eyes from her work and fixed them eagerly on the door; then a slight shade of disappointment passed over her face as she assiduously resumed her employment.

"I have been calculating, during your absence, Margaret, how much our present expenditure will exceed the income at our disposal during the ensuing year. The result of my labour is as you see," said Mr Desmond gravely, putting into his daughter's hand a sheet of paper covered with figures.

Margaret sat down, and glanced quickly over the paper. As she read, the serious concern resting on her face increased; nor did she speak again for some minutes after finishing its perusal.

"Well, Margaret, you see we shall need a repetition of the miracle of the widow's cruse to struggle

on anywhere with such an income as that! To be sure my books would sell for something," resumed Mr Desmond bitterly, while his eyes surveyed with sorrowful regret the bookcases containing his small though choice library.

"Let me look, Margaret," said Mrs Desmond, laying aside her work.

"You see, dear papa, we have before discussed every scheme likely to afford extrication from our difficulties. I feel persuaded there is but one—we must leave this place. Let us therefore submit courageously and patiently to that for which there is indeed no help," said Margaret, earnestly.

"Towards which quarter of the world would you have us direct our steps, Margaret? America, I should think might afford some pathless wild, cheap and obscure enough!" rejoined Mr Desmond moodily; for the anxiety of the past few days began to manifest itself in an impatience of temper, which aggravated much his personal discomfort, and that of every one around.

Margaret looked grieved.

"What do you say to Cornwall or Devonshire? I have heard that both these counties combine these

two indispensables to our future comfort,—cheapness of living, and an agreeable country," observed she soothingly.

"Oh, Margaret, I know Devonshire is the most charming part of England! This is a delightful suggestion of yours, my dear. A friend of mine once resided near Torquay, and she used to talk in raptures of the beauty of the villas and gardens in that neighbourhood!" exclaimed Mrs Desmond eagerly, putting down the paper and resuming her work.

Mr Desmond shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I should like to hear, Margaret, how you propose that we shall perform this journey of three hundred miles. My opinion is, if we go into Devonshire, that the least expensive mode would be to hire a caravan, pack up our goods and chattels, and travel thither in patriarchal fashion!" rejoined he sarcastically.

"Would it not be better to take a small furnished house, wherever we fix our future abode?" asked Margaret, firmly.

"The debt which involves such perplexity is only owing to Mr Compton, I perceive," suddenly exclaimed Mrs Desmond; as if the fact had all at

once burst upon her. "Oh, Margaret, if George Compton's assiduities could win from you the slightest return, you know we need not quit Woodthorpe at all. He has been here this evening, to inquire into the truth of the report of our approaching departure. Poor fellow! he seemed almost frantic with grief," added she quickly and deprecatingly.

"Mr Compton joined me during my walk. Mamma, you well know that it is utterly impossible for me to afford him any encouragement. I could not conscientiously do so," replied Margaret in a low voice; while tears trembled in her eyes, as she steadily bent them on the table.

"Still, Margaret, I think you might be very happy with George Compton," persisted Mrs Desmond, speaking in the same deprecating tones. "Mr Compton, I understand, intends to give up Pool House to his son on his marriage; besides which, it is said that Sir James Somerton means to make George his steward next year. Old Compton has more money than he knows what to do with, and therefore can afford to give his son's wife an affluent home."

"It so happens, however, Mrs Desmond, that I have other views for my daughter. The fairest way of doing the thing, according to your notions, would

be to put Margaret's hand up to auction, and he who bids above the amount of this unlucky debt, for which you counsel her to sacrifice herself, shall take her. Your friend then, as he is so rich, would have a famous chance among other candidates," retorted Mr Desmond, irritably.

"My remarks were made only on the supposition that Margaret could eventually like him, Mr Desmond. George Compton has the best and kindest heart, and any woman might lead the happiest of lives with him," replied Mrs Desmond.

Mr Desmond smiled, then turned over the pages of the book before him. Margaret sat in silent meditation, her face nearly concealed by her hands.

"It is very long since you heard from Methwold Abbey, papa. I suppose that you think it useless to apply for assistance there?" said she at last, slowly.

"Quite so, Margaret. Agatha Beaufort would sooner see me, and those belonging to me, starve, than proffer a shilling to avert such a doom," replied Mr Desmond decisively.

"Yet, papa, years may have wrought a change in Mrs Beaufort's character. You are her nearest relative; and surely in our distress she would not cruelly withhold aid, which, with her wealth, she

can so readily afford. I think we may afterwards regret not having appealed to her," rejoined Margaret persuasively.

"You know not Agatha Beaufort's implacable resentment, Margaret, or you would not talk thus. I have irretrievably offended her—at least my marriage with your mother did. I will not afford her haughty spirit another opportunity of triumphing over our poverty and misfortunes."

"If you will be advised by me, papa, I should say, write immediately to Mrs Beaufort. At any rate, such an application can do us no harm," persisted Margaret, very earnestly, rising; and then, kneeling on a footstool by her father's chair, she raised her clear, earnest eyes beseechingly to his, and drew the writing-case before him.

"I wish you would follow Margaret's advice, Mr Desmond. I remember once seeing a picture of Methwold Abbey, and a princely place it seems to be. Upon an estate like hers, Mrs Beaufort must have some house—for example, such a one as this—that very likely she might offer to us."

"Perhaps she may propose to make me her steward: which you know, my dear, would almost answer as well as marrying Margaret to Sir James

Somerton's," replied Mr Desmond bitterly. Then turning towards his daughter, he continued: "As for writing to Mrs Beaufort, I tell you, Margaret, it is wholly out of the question. Her reply would be a bitter taunt on our penury; to which I will not subject myself. It is more than seventeen years since I held the slightest communication with her: for Agatha Beaufort's conduct to your poor mother, Margaret, when you were born, is alone enough to make me ever detest and shun her!" exclaimed Mr Desmond, vehemently.

"It is very painful, I know, to sue for compassion, and kindness from the hard-hearted; yet, dear papa, appeal once more, I implore you, to Mrs Beaufort's generosity," murmured Margaret, in a low voice.

"Nonsense, Margaret: you do not know what you are talking about. Shall I ask any favour at the hands of this hard-hearted woman, whose harshness imbittered your mother's end?" replied Mr Desmond, rising in great agitation, and pacing up and down the room.

"Mrs Beaufort may even now be longing to offer reparation. Afford her then the opportunity," pleaded Margaret, still speaking in the same low voice.

Mr Desmond continued for some time in moody thought.

"I did hear a few years ago that some incomprehensible mystery imbitters her days, and sheds gloom over her prosperity. Perhaps, having tasted sorrow herself, her heart may now be more accessible to compassion for the misfortunes of others," said Mr Desmond, after a long pause, reseating himself at the table.

In an instant Margaret put a pen into her father's hand.

"Give Mrs Beaufort this one trial more, I beseech you, dear papa!" exclaimed she caressingly.

"Well, Margaret, remember that it is quite against my own inclination, and solely in compliance with your entreaty, that I submit to the humiliation of preferring another petition to Agatha Beaufort!" said Mr Desmond, as he slowly and reluctantly drew the paper before him and commenced his letter.

To explain the source of the enmity subsisting between Mr Desmond and his wealthy cousin, it will be necessary to revert to the earlier events of their lives. Mr Desmond was the only child of the late Sir John Beaufort's elder sister, who married a

gentleman of small fortune, moving in a station of life somewhat inferior to her own.

This marriage was exceedingly displeasing to Mrs Desmond's relations, who for long held aloof from the slightest intercourse with her husband. Her brother, Sir John Beaufort, was a man of proud, irascible temper, slow to be conciliated, and possessed of the most overweening notions of family importance and dignity. Still, mingled with much that was dark and objectionable, there were some good traits in Sir John's character, which occasionally revealed themselves; though, even while yielding to the inspirations of his better nature, his actions were clouded by a sullen reserve, and a frigid indifference inexpressibly repelling.

He was generous to profusion, when the mood was upon him,—if the mere disregard of money, by a man who had plenty to lavish, can so be designated,—just and liberal in his dealings with his dependants, charitable to the poor on his large estates: not, however, from innate principle, we must add, but from a desire to appropriate and perpetuate that fame for liberality and good works, which, with but few exceptions, had been the heritage of his ancestors for generations back. Consequently, Sir John's noble benefactions were found

duly chronicled in golden letters on the panels of the galleries and on the walls of the little church of Methwold; so that every returning Sabbath his eye rested complacently on the record of his own good deeds, while his dependants were thus constantly reminded of his claim on their veneration and gratitude.

Sir John's right to be considered a benevolent and generous man was, however, according to his own notions, for ever confirmed, when, on the death of his sister and her husband, he at once declared himself the guardian and protector of their orphan child. From the age of twelve years, therefore, Francis Desmond found a home at Methwold; and there enjoyed in every respect the same privileges as his cousins. At this period Sir John was a widower; his wife, the Lady Blanche, having died about three years previously, leaving him two children, a son and a daughter.

The same regard for public opinion, and the exaltation of the house of Beaufort, the actuating principles ever prompting Sir John's deeds, had influenced him in his choice of a wife. The Lady Blanche's descent was unimpeachable; though she herself was a thoroughly unloveable person: stiff, stately, and sedate, her words were icicles, and effec-

tually chilled any approach to cordiality others might feel inclined to proffer. Her mind was narrow, and never expanded in generous impulse: indeed, Lady Blanche was one of those little-minded persons who deliberately calculate beforehand the line of action most profitable and politic for them to pursue, and once having resolved, resolutely maintain that decision against persuasion or remonstrance the most urgent; simply because they distrust themselves, and fear to be cajoled into some concession which, on reflection, they might afterwards repent.

Sir John, meanwhile, beheld with cordial approval the formal grandeur with which his wife dispensed the hospitalities of Methwold; and after her death, as he gazed on the son she had born him, and on the stately majesty of her figure—as represented in the picture which he immediately caused to be painted, and added to the portraits of the Beauforts hanging in the family gallery—he acknowledged with a sigh, that the Lady Blanche had indeed, in every respect, nobly fulfilled her worldly callings.

Meanwhile, Francis Desmond continued to live on most harmonious terms with his two cousins. When he attained the age of twenty, Sir John's influence

obtained his nephew's nomination to a clerkship in the Foreign Office, with promise of speedy promotion: an appointment the baronet had intended for his son; but Mr Beaufort persisted in his resolve to enter the army, and resolutely closed his ear to his father's expostulations on the subject, with an obstinacy worthy of the family characteristic.

There was another inmate of the mansion, meanwhile, whose rapid growth to womanhood had scarce been noticed: this was Sir John's daughter. Agatha Beaufort, at the age of nineteen, inherited that rare beauty and grace of manner which had long rendered the female members of her house celebrated for their personal charms. Her features were almost perfect in proportion and regularity; yet there was a stern severity in their expression, which at times made her beauty terrible to gaze upon. There was unquelled passion, and a resolution which neither peril nor menace could daunt, in the lightning glance of her full dark eye; and oft-times in the passionate quivering of her lip, and the momentary dilatation of the proud nostril, those skilled in reading character could discern extraordinary power of suppressing outward emotion; while the ready tact with which kind and gracious words flowed from her beautiful mouth,

immediately on recovering from such involuntary impulse, denoted that her dissimulation more than equalled her self-command.

Agatha Beaufort possessed great quickness of intellect, and what she chose to learn she accomplished well and easily. The utmost care and trouble had been bestowed upon her education. Learning, however, she loved, not for itself alone, but only as a source of power: for this end she pursued it with the full vigour and determination of a character which scorned defeat. The multitude of masters and governesses it had been Sir John's pleasure to engage to superintend his daughter's studies, were speedily given to understand by this very energetic and wilful young lady, that only to such subjects as excited her interest and pleased her fancy, was it her sovereign will to devote the slightest attention. Some remonstrated, others complained to Sir John; but all to no purpose: Miss Beaufort's rebellious spirit defied restraint; and, from the age of twelve years upwards, she reigned sole arbitress of the school-room.

After her *début*, Miss Beaufort's ordinary manner in society was lively and affable; when nothing occurred to ruffle her temper, or to offend the pride which glowed so strongly in her bosom. Did any

unlucky individual, however, presuming on the apparent good-natured condescension of her manner, venture to transgress on this forbidden ground, the cold contemptuous glance of haughty amazement, which quickly replaced Miss Beaufort's courteous words and smiles, unpleasantly reminded her friends that, however *she* might condescend, *they* must not presume.

Between Agatha Beaufort and her cousin Francis the strictest amity and good fellowship prevailed. Her only brother, Hugh, too closely resembled herself in impetuous warmth of disposition to prove a congenial companion; and whenever they met a contest usually ensued. Francis Desmond was the mediator in these youthful contentions, and continued to exercise his good offices between, and preserve the favour of both his cousins, until the departure of Mr Beaufort to join his regiment abroad. Since the period of Lady Blanche Beaufort's decease, Sir John had secluded himself very much from the world; so that Agatha, possessing few friends, and leading a life of retirement at the Abbey, at this time found her cousin's society and friendship a valuable acquisition.

Some six months after Mr Beaufort's departure abroad, a small pretty house in the village of Meth-

wold, belonging to Sir John, was taken by a widow lady of the name of Sullivan, who came to reside there with her two children. Mrs Sullivan's late husband was the son of a wealthy merchant, who, at his father's death, had succeeded to a flourishing trade. After a brief course of prosperity, however, Mr Sullivan became involved, and at length completely ruined, by an unfortunate speculation; and distress and anxiety of mind occasioned his sudden death a few months after his failure. This disaster was fatal to the prospects of his children; as, when Mr Sullivan's affairs were investigated, it was found that his widow would have but a bare pittance to subsist upon. Basil Sullivan, therefore, who during his father's short career of prosperity had been studying at Cambridge, was compelled to quit the university, and share his mother's humble home.

Soon after the widow's arrival at Methwold, Miss Sullivan presented herself at the Abbey, to solicit Miss Beaufort's patronage and aid, in an attempt she was about to make to add somewhat to her mother's slender income by giving lessons in embroidery.

Agnes Sullivan, to look upon, was one of those fair, fragile creatures, too bright for sorrow to subdue. There was a mute eloquence in the earnest glance of

her blue eyes, and something so touching in the meek unmurmuring resignation with which she alluded to her reverses, that kindled even Miss Beaufort's pity.

Agatha's actions were impetuous and decided as her character; she therefore at once declared it to be her royal intent to take the Sullivans, one and all, under her patronage. For some months Agnes made daily visits to the Abbey, for the ostensible purpose of giving lessons in embroidery to her new friend. Soon the remaining portions of the day were also occupied by abundance of pupils; for such was Miss Beaufort's perseverance in promoting the interest of her protegée, that it required a greater degree of determination than many of her friends possessed, to negative her vehement request that they also would extend their patronage to the Sullivans.

Gradually this interchange of visits between the young ladies became more frequent, and in a short time all Miss Sullivan's leisure hours were spent at the Abbey; for, though little congeniality existed between her timid, retiring character, and that of Miss Beaufort, the latter (who never before possessed a female friend) found inexpressible pleasure in pouring into the ear of her gentle companion some of the strange thoughts and fancies of her past years of solitude: besides,

Agatha, like many other proud persons, loved to contemplate her own work in her friend's comparative prosperity; and the idea that she alone possessed Agnes's friendship, to the exclusion of all others, flattered her vanity and self-love.

Miss Sullivan's gentle spirit, however, might soon have tired of Agatha's exacting humour, had not more thrilling interest soon mingled in her daily visits to the Abbey. Mr Desmond and she were naturally thrown a great deal into each other's society; and soon he became irresistibly fascinated by the feminine mildness and winning grace of her manner and deportment. To pass from Miss Beaufort's society to that of her friend, was like transition from the full blaze of a mid-day sun, to soft, shadowy moonlight. Mr Desmond's admiration and assiduous homage speedily awoke a responsive feeling in Miss Sullivan's breast; and before the lapse of many months they had secretly plighted faith.

Miss Beaufort, meantime, had been an unconscious spectator of the attachment progressing between her cousin and her friend. Basil Sullivan was now nearly as frequent a visiter at the Abbey as his sister; and Agatha, in her eager efforts to decipher his character, which had hitherto baffled her pene-

tration, condescendingly devoted to him so much of her conversation and attention, that the lovers found ample opportunity to enjoy each other's exclusive society. Seldom had two people so nearly connected afforded such decided contrast, in person and disposition, as Basil Sullivan and his sister. He inherited none of that refined grace and symmetry of feature so particularly distinguishing her; on the contrary, nothing could be less attractive than his whole outward deportment. He was small in stature, and his manner had an uncouth, disagreeable abruptness, almost repellent on a first introduction.

Yet the mind, after all, was the most extraordinary part of Mr Basil Sullivan. He had read much, and dipped into most subjects; the result of his studies being, that he had spun in his own mind a series of the wildest and most improbable theories; which, when attacked, he was always ready to prove and maintain with an amazing degree of clever fluency. He was a disciple of the Jean Jacques Rousseau school: "the man," arrayed in the power and majesty of intellect, apart from all social distinctions, was the idol he professed to worship. Armed thus with an utter impassibility to outward station, and recognising genius only as the legitimate source which elevated

one man above another, Mr Basil Sullivan was the very person to meet Miss Beaufort on her own ground.

They talked on poetry, philosophy, politics, and belles lettres; discussed German mysticism and French sophistry with an ardour worthy of the keenest controvertists: indeed, there was no theme however subtle, or argument so abstruse, on which Miss Beaufort's powerful mind had dwelt, that Mr Sullivan did not dilate upon, with a boldness and originality of fancy which ever riveted his auditor's attention. Despite, however, his manifold eccentricities, Mr Basil Sullivan was not proof against that most insidious of human passions—love; and when for weeks he found himself monopolizing the undivided attention and smiles of the beautiful girl, who sat listening to his words with deep apparent interest, it is not to be wondered at, if at length his philosophy yielded.

In Miss Beaufort, Mr Sullivan saw nothing more august than the beautiful, strong-minded woman; and he flattered himself that it was her intellect alone which had achieved the victory over him: he loved her, in short; and he dared to tell her so. Brief, however, was his illusion that these philosophical arguments had wrought the same miracle on

her mind. Miss Beaufort stood a moment, stunned with amaze at the bold confession; the next, her beautiful eyes flamed with the fierceness of indignation, and her figure quivered with passionate excitement. Words of keen, contemptuous irony then slowly fell from her lips—words such as, when listened to and applied, make men bitter foes for life. She then turned scornfully away, and quitted the room, and Mr Basil Sullivan saw her no more.

Not content with rigorously enforcing the ban which henceforth excluded Mr Sullivan from her presence, Miss Beaufort determined to extend it to his sister likewise. The Sullivans, emboldened by her condescension, had insolently presumed to disregard their subordinate position, as creatures whom her bounty had raised from obscurity—a crime unpardonable to her haughty spirit. Consequently, the following morning after her brother's bold avowal of his love, Agnes received a letter from Miss Beaufort, couched in tones of cold civility; declining for the present all further intercourse, and referring her for explanation to Mr Basil Sullivan.

Vainly Mr Desmond expostulated with his cousin on this unjust exclusion of her friend from the Abbey; until at length, indignant at the obduracy of her re-

sentment, he boldly avowed his own engagement to Agnes Sullivan.

Language can inadequately convey an idea of the consternation this confession produced at the Abbey. Sir John, rousing from the mental and bodily apathy which his daughter's enterprising disposition, since the death of his wife, had allowed him to indulge, peremptorily commanded his nephew to relinquish a project so humiliating to the family dignity. Unmoved, however, by Sir John's threats, or his cousin's scornful silence, Mr Desmond resolutely maintained his right to consult his inclination, rather than the family ambition, in his choice of a wife. After five days of hot contention, the affair was brought to a crisis by Sir John; who gave his nephew four and twenty hours to decide between the alternative of immediately breaking off his engagement with Miss Sullivan, or of banishment from Methwold.

There was that in Sir John's manner and language which roused the most vehement passion in Mr Desmond's breast. Unmindful, therefore, of the manifold obligations he owed to his uncle, he commenced instant preparation for leaving the Abbey, and removing to Mrs Sullivan's house.

Neither Sir John nor Miss Beaufort offered the slightest impediment to this hasty step; nor did they manifest more concern when, after the lapse of a fortnight, a few brief lines from Mr Desmond, addressed to his cousin, announced that Agnes had become his wife. From that time, however, Francis Desmond's name was never uttered by them: every object that could awaken associations of any kind in which her cousin mingled, was carefully removed by Miss Beaufort; and the servants were strictly forbidden to mention Mr Desmond, or to revert to the period of his residence at the Abbey.

For some time after his marriage, affairs went on pretty smoothly with Mr Desmond, and enabled him to retaliate somewhat of the scornful indifference manifested by his relatives. In his wife's devotion, and gentle loveable temper, he found that domestic happiness and repose which his cousin's haughty stateliness effectually banished from his former home at Methwold.

Yet Agnes, despite her beauty and unwearied attachment, was not the wife Mr Desmond's circumstances required. Her character lacked moral elevation, and those stronger points which should have stimulated and encouraged her husband's energy and perseverance, resolutely to combat the adverse position

his marriage with her entailed. Her lips never affectionately admonished him of the danger of yielding, as was too often Mr Desmond's habit, to a natural indolence of disposition, that prompted him to indulge at home when business imperatively demanded his attention elsewhere; or of that ruinous, indiscriminate expenditure in trifling matters, which his previous affluence in some measure had rendered habitual.

Her affection and devotion imparted a charm hitherto unknown to his hours of relaxation; but like the delicate flower that infolds itself, and shrinks at the first murmurs of the coming storm, so the spirit of Agnes drooped when adversity saddened her husband's brow. Silent and resigned, she helped him not in those hours of despondency, when the mind sinks dejected under the pressure of misfortune: she never spoke those words inciting to renewed hope or exertion, or kindled again that noble energy and steadfastness of purpose which, if rightly directed, must ultimately prevail.

The first seven years of Mrs Desmond's married life were, nevertheless, darkened with much domestic sorrow; hard even for her equable, unimaginative disposition to endure. During this period, besides the death of her mother, Agnes had to mourn the

loss of two children; and a few months after her marriage, her beloved brother Basil also quitted England, and she never subsequently heard from him.

Three more years elapsed, during which pecuniary embarrassments increased upon Mr Desmond so rapidly and overwhelmingly, that he was compelled to resign his situation, and retire on the pension his past services had earned. To reside longer then in London was an impossibility: besides, Mrs Desmond's failing health rendered a purer atmosphere indispensable. Agnes was again near her confinement; and her health, never strong, had long been yielding beneath the inroads of poverty and anxiety. Some months, therefore, after their removal from London, Margaret was born: but Mr Desmond's joy at his daughter's birth was speedily converted into mourning; for Agnes survived her accouchement only a few days.

It was during the dreary period of suspense preceding this sad event, that Mr Desmond's high spirit—humbled by oft-repeated strokes of adversity, and harrowed by witnessing the daily suffering, and unremitting resignation with which his meek wife submitted to the privations their position imposed—bent itself to appeal to the compassionate generosity of Sir John Beaufort and his daughter.

About two years after Mr Desmond's marriage, Sir John had suddenly broken up his establishment at the Abbey, for causes which ever continued to mystify the neighbourhood; and after travelling about for some time on the Continent, took up his abode in Rome; where he had since resided, in a style of splendour infinitely in accordance with Miss Beaufort's haughty, ostentatious spirit.

Before she quitted the Abbey, a new aspirant for Agatha's hand appeared in the person of Mr James Somerton, second son of Sir Henry Somerton; who resided at Dingley Grange, a mansion in the immediate vicinity of Methwold. Of rank sufficiently elevated, as even Agatha acknowledged, to match with a Beaufort, Mr James Somerton possessed an easy good temper, and a pliability of mind calculated to recommend him to the favour of a woman of Miss Beaufort's imperious temperament. He knew how to yield and fall in with her prejudices, while possessing the art of veiling the extent of his compliance: in short, Miss Beaufort bestowed upon him as much of her esteem and regard as she had at her disposal.

There was one thing, however, Agatha was not disposed to overlook; and which, despite her prepossession, ultimately sufficed to turn the scale against

Mr Somerton's pretensions: he was a younger son, and the income arising from his commission in the Guards was the amount of his worldly wealth. After being suffered, therefore, to make due exhibition of his devotion, he received a summary dismissal from the lips of Sir John. Four months later, Mr James Somerton, by the accidental death of his elder brother, became heir to his father's estates and title. Vainly then, it was whispered, Miss Beaufort put forth her most winning blandishments, to lure back her rejected suitor to his allegiance. Mr Somerton, however, was not to be so propitiated; and soon afterwards, to her intense mortification, Agatha heard of his engagement to another lady, her superior in rank, though far beneath herself in personal charms. Unable, therefore, it was reported, to brook the whispered comments and conjectures of their friends and the public, on the disappointment of her ambition; and wishing to avoid, for the present, a meeting with the new Lady Mary Somerton; Miss Beaufort's importunity induced Sir John, though much against his inclination, to break up his establishment at the Abbey, and fix his residence abroad for some years.

From the period of Mr Desmond's marriage, how-

ever, it was remarked that, if possible, Miss Beaufort shrouded herself in deeper and more impenetrable reserve. Her face, likewise, in its calm severe beauty, became almost rigid in its expression of passionless repose; while her queenly figure towered above all others in lofty dignity of carriage. No one guessed, however, the bitterness of spirit which tortured her solitary hours, and that made her loathe, and with shuddering aversion submit to, whatever brought her in contact with the world, or compelled her to put even momentary restraint on her wayward depression.

Cold and outwardly insensible, the people she associated with abroad, at length began to contemplate her marvellous beauty with the wondering admiration they bestowed on a faultless piece of statuary. Numerous, nevertheless, were the suitors Sir John's great wealth procured for his daughter's hand: but Miss Beaufort steadily declared it to be her intention not to take a husband during her father's lifetime; and no one of her admirers proved enamoured enough to make any very energetic endeavour to induce her to alter her resolution.

Such were Miss Beaufort's circumstances and posi-

tion when Mr Desmond's letter reached her: but no spark of relenting pity for him kindled at her heart. Vehement in her resentments, her spirit hated with all the unswerving pertinacity of which a character strong and resolute of purpose as her own was capable. Not a syllable of her cousin's appeal did she think it necessary to submit to Sir John; and a very few minutes after its reception, the fire consumed that which it had cost Mr Desmond so bitter a pang to write.

From that time to the period when our tale opens, Mr Desmond made no further attempt to propitiate his unforgiving relatives. A year after his wife's death he married the daughter of the village surgeon, whose skill had soothed Agnes's dying moments. Most conscientiously Mrs Desmond fulfilled her duties towards her husband's motherless little daughter, and as the latter grew up to womanhood, her care and affection met with its due reward; for Margaret, despite the frequent want of consistency in her stepmother's character, loved her with devoted affection.

For many years Mr Desmond's intelligence of Sir John and his daughter came only through indirect channels, and at long intervals. About two years after the date of his second marriage, they quitted

Rome; in consequence, as it was reported, of a serious *fracas* between Sir John and his secretary: a mysterious affair, in which, as usual, Miss Beaufort's turbulent temper was supposed to take the lead.

Sir John set out immediately on his journey back to the Abbey—the more hastily, as his daughter's health had been for some time in a declining state, and a speedy return to her native air was enjoined as essential to her recovery. Whether, however, from agitation consequent on her hurried journey, or that the strivings of her restless spirit had completely exhausted her physical powers, by the time she reached Milan, Miss Beaufort became so dangerously ill as to be totally unable to proceed. For many weeks Agatha hovered between life and death; and when pronounced out of danger, her progress towards convalescence was slow and unsteady. Throughout Miss Beaufort's illness she was assiduously attended by her maid Cartaret,—the only personage, excepting her father, for whom she ever exhibited the slightest consideration.

As soon as his daughter was able to travel, Sir John, who had submitted with visible impatience and irritation to the unavoidable delay at Milan, immediately resumed his homeward journey.

From the period of Sir John's return to Methwold till his death, which happened about eighteen months afterwards, the little intercourse which existed between Miss Beaufort and her father became a matter of general comment in their household. Days elapsed without their meeting; and when together, there was a cold taunting indifference in Sir John's tone and deportment, while addressing his daughter, which attracted universal attention. The cause of this extraordinary coolness no one ever discovered; for the carefully guarded deportment of both father and daughter afforded nothing on which suspicion might even centre.

Public astonishment, however, reached its climax when, on the reading of Sir John Beaufort's will, it was found that he had left everything in his power to bequeath to his son,—Miss Beaufort's name being only mentioned in a codicil lately appended, which prohibited her continued residence at Methwold during her brother's absence, and alluded to her being amply provided for by the twenty thousand pounds secured to her by her mother's marriage settlement.

Before one of Sir John's testamentary injunctions could be carried into effect,—nay, almost before he was laid in the grave—letters

arrived from India announcing Mr Beaufort's sudden death. As the latter died childless, and without a will, the whole princely heritage of the Beauforts of Methwold Abbey, centred in his only sister Agatha.

This unexpected and triumphant accession to the wealth and honours of her family, made no perceptible alteration in Miss Beaufort's mode of life. During the first ten years of her solitary state, she had again numerous opportunities of changing her condition; but all matrimonial overtures she steadily declined.

After a further lapse of time, conceiving it to be more suitable to her dignity, and the influential position which she occupied, Miss Beaufort dropped her maidenly appellation, and was thenceforth addressed as Mrs Agatha Beaufort.

CHAPTER III.

DURING the next few weeks, as if by mutual consent, no allusion to their proposed removal from Woodthorpe was volunteered by any member of Mr Desmond's family. Mrs Beaufort's name also was never mentioned amongst them; yet morning after morning, Margaret's earnest gaze riveted itself with unspeakable anxiety on her father's face, on his return from the village post-office. So frequently had she heard Mr Desmond expatiate on the vindictiveness of Mrs Beaufort's character, that her heart sank within her; and though she had strongly counselled, and even spoken positively to her father of the undoubted success of his application, something like the chill of despair now mingled with her suspense.

Yet Margaret's grief sprang not from that hopelessness which prostrates the soul in indescribable bitterness, and by sapping as it were its vital energies, leaves it the prey and sport of unrestrained

impulse: she knew that a mighty though invisible support through every difficulty is given to all who ask and trust; and in the assurance of this aid being vouchsafed, she reposed.

Thoughts of high and courageous endurance of impending evil mingled with her fears, and chased away the desponding melancholy which oppressed her heart, as Margaret sat alone in her own little room, some ten weeks after the despatch of her father's letter to Methwold; again anxiously awaiting his return from the village. Her arm rested upon an open book on the table before her; but it was not the contents of its page which kindled again and again the changeful hue of her cheek, or filled her soft eyes with tears. At length the door of the room opened, and Mrs Desmond appeared. Margaret hastily looked up.

"Your father is not yet returned, Margaret. I do not suppose, however, that he will bring back a letter from odious Mrs Beaufort: she evidently does not intend to vouchsafe an answer. I am convinced now, that no aid will be forthcoming from Methwold!" exclaimed Mrs Desmond, advancing to the table, and laying her hand on Margaret's shoulder.

"Yet you thought differently, mamma, when it was first proposed that papa should write to Mrs Beaufort."

"Yes; but I am quite of a different opinion now. Mrs Beaufort would have written long ago had she intended to make amends for the injury she has done your father," replied Mrs Desmond quickly; then drawing a chair to the table, she sat down.

There was an expression of unusual restraint on Mrs Desmond's good-humoured face, and a slight embarrassment in her tone and manner, which did not escape Margaret's observation. Mrs Desmond presently rose from her chair, and leaning out of the window, busied herself in bending back to its place a luxuriant branch of roses, which still in defiance of the weather drooped a shower of fragrant flowers on the window-sill. She then resumed her seat. Margaret did not speak, knowing that her mother's anxiety, from whatever cause it might arise, would speedily vent itself in words.

"Mr Compton has been sitting with me ever since your father left for his walk, Margaret," at length said she, in tones as indifferent as she could command.

Margaret acknowledged this piece of intelligence

by a brief monosyllable; then Mrs Desmond continued hastily, with rather heightened colour:

"You will be displeased with me I know, Margaret, for broaching the subject again to you;—but have you quite made up your mind to reject George Compton's addresses? Mr Compton, in the most honourable, candid manner, stated this morning, that the day he could welcome you as his daughter-in-law would be the proudest and happiest of his life. He earnestly entreated me to use my influence with you in behalf of his son. As you know, Margaret, our poverty and obscurity must ever prevent you marrying in your father's former sphere, and as at present you can have no other attachment, consider before you reject a young man so very superior as George Compton—one who can offer you future affluence!"

Mrs Desmond paused. She had urged her daughter's compliance in stronger language than she would have ventured to utter in her husband's presence. Yet in exhorting Margaret to do violence to the feelings she had so frequently heard her express, Mrs Desmond was conscious of no want of principle; for she devoutly believed that, after Margaret's youthful imaginings had had time to subside, she would bestow her regard on the husband who had given

her the comfortable, prosperous home, blended with a devotion so complete as she knew George Compton's was likely to be. Eagerly, therefore, Mrs Desmond listened for Margaret's reply.

"Did not Mr Compton tell you that I declined his son's proposals again last night, mamma? That decision nothing shall induce me to revoke. It would be utterly repugnant to my feelings to become Mr George Compton's wife: not that I think his station in life beneath me, only that I do not, and never can, love him. But you have something more to tell me, mamma. May I not see that letter in your hand?" asked Margaret, in calmer tones.

Again the colour rose to Mrs Desmond's cheeks. She hastily withdrew her hand.

"Although you speak so unconcernedly of Mr Compton and his son, I assure you we are more deeply indebted to them than you imagine, Margaret," rejoined she, in that tone of mingled displeasure and defiance which people often assume when they do not feel very sure how their next communication may be received. "Mr Compton has acted the part of a true and sincere friend to us in our difficulties. Considering, most justly, that it might be highly disagreeable to your father to accept pecuniary aid

from him as matters stand between George Compton and yourself, Mr Compton resolved to enlist Mr Somerton's friendship in our behalf. Accordingly, this morning he obtained an interview with the latter, and the result is what you must now read;" and Mrs Desmond placed a letter before her daughter.

Margaret eagerly took it up. It enclosed a cheque for the amount owing to Mr Compton. For some minutes Margaret remained silent, after perusing Mr Somerton's courteously worded letter to her father.

"It is generous—most generous. Mr Somerton does not belie his high character. Yet, mamma, I am very much mistaken if this loan from a perfect stranger will not be a source of great annoyance to papa: neither do I think that Mr Compton was justified in making the application without first consulting us."

"Margaret, your fastidiousness is enough to provoke a saint. What in the world is there to prevent your father from availing himself of Mr Somerton's generosity? What can this paltry sum be to him? I shall advise your father to accept this aid, repay Mr Compton, and thus extricate himself from his difficulties. I hope you will do so likewise."

Miss Desmond shook her head.

"Mamma, if I am right in judging papa's feelings by my own, he will consider himself bound to repay Mr Somerton as speedily as he would have done Mr Compton," replied she decisively.

Mrs Desmond's face clouded over.

"Well, Margaret, we seem beset with difficulties on every side by your ridiculous scruples. Perhaps it will be better to allow your father to decide for himself. Mr Somerton will soon forget his kind deed towards us, for Mr Compton says it is reported that he is going to be married; so you need not shrink under a sense of humiliation every time you encounter his eye," rejoined she, rather wrathfully.

Margaret arose.

"Who is Mr Somerton going to marry?" asked she hastily.

"The report after all may only be a piece of scandal, you know, my dear: but Mr Compton said that he understood Mr Somerton was engaged to marry a Miss Berners; and strangely enough, he added, that she was a connexion of Mrs Beaufort's of Methwold Abbey. Did you ever hear of this Miss Berners before, Margaret?"

"A niece of the late Lady Blanche Beaufort's married a Captain Berners. Mr Somerton's be-

trothed must be her daughter I suppose," replied Margaret thoughtfully.

"Probably, my dear: I dare say, however, it will not signify to us who she is. Here comes your father!" exclaimed Mrs Desmond, hurriedly quitting the room.

Margaret approached the window. A presentiment that her father's walk would not have its usual fruitless issue, and that tidings of some kind from Mrs Beaufort would greet him, had haunted her throughout the morning. Mr Desmond was walking slowly up the lane towards his house. Anxiously Margaret sought some index on her father's face to solve her suspense; he looked grave, and she thought sterner than usual. Mrs Desmond met him at the garden gate; then, after the exchange of a few words, the sudden disappearance of the smile which almost always beamed on her step-mother's good-natured face, convinced Margaret that her father's communication was not of the most cheering nature. She immediately descended to the dining-room. Mr Desmond was standing with his back to the fireplace.

"There is Mrs Beaufort's letter, Margaret. Read it. You will find that we cannot at any rate accuse her of inconsistency!" said Mr Desmond bitterly,

as his daughter entered the room, pointing to an open letter on the table.

Margaret took up the letter. Mrs Beaufort's writing was clear and bold, and the character strong. It was evident also, from the frequent underlining of sentences and words, that her communication was intended to be especially emphatic and decisive. The letter was as follows :—

" Methwold Abbey.

" Mrs Beaufort has to acknowledge the receipt of a letter from Mr Desmond, stating his pecuniary embarrassments, and pleading to be released therefrom on the grounds of family affinity, and of the cordial friendship which once existed between them.

" Mrs Beaufort avows herself totally unable to comprehend how, with even the semblance of consistency, Mr Desmond can frame his request on either of these pleas. She should have imagined, with regard to the first, that few could so well appreciate the prompt unerring retribution with which the Beauforts punish discredit due to their house and race, as one bearing the name of Desmond. As for the second reason, on which Mr Desmond excuses his

application, Mrs Beaufort feels surprised that he considers it worth while to recall or revert to the friendship she formerly felt for him; when it proved incapable of awakening him to a sense of what was due to his family, or of saving him from a connexion degrading and, as it has proved, ruinous in every respect.

"Having stated so much, upon the principle of relieving necessity wherever she meets with it, Mrs Beaufort proposes, as she has been sometime in search of a lady to act towards her in the capacity of companion and reader, to appoint Miss Desmond to that post, with a yearly salary of fifty pounds. Should it suit Mr Desmond to accept this offer, Mrs Beaufort is willing moreover to bestow upon him, as some compensation for the loss of his daughter's society, an annual stipend of £200. Miss Desmond will occupy in Mrs Beaufort's household the same rank and position that her mother before her marriage would there have been entitled to hold. It is also Mrs Beaufort's express desire that Miss Desmond should never allude publicly or privately (especially in the presence of Miss Berners) to the family connexion subsisting between them. Any infringement of this condition

on Miss Desmond's part will be followed by the immediate loss of Mrs Beaufort's patronage.

"If Mrs Beaufort does not receive an answer by return of post, she will conclude that her offer is rejected. Should Miss Desmond, however, resolve to avail herself of the proposal, Mrs Beaufort will send her maid Cartaret to meet her, next Wednesday-week at four o'clock in the afternoon, at the Denbridge Station."

For some moments Margaret remained silent after the perusal of Mrs Beaufort's letter: although her heroism generally enabled her to conquer outward emotion, tears now swiftly stole down her cheeks. The disappointment was bitter; for Mrs Beaufort's taunts struck with a pang deeper and more acute than she could have supposed possible.

"Margaret, my darling child, console yourself. Did I not tell you how hopeless it was to trust that Agatha Beaufort's heart could relent? Now she would wreak her hatred upon you, my child, as she did on your poor mother! Weep not, Margaret: let me not see that Agatha Beaufort has power to wring tears from you also!" exclaimed Mr Desmond vehe-

mently, as he stooped, and kissed his daughter's brow. "Give me the letter, Margaret," continued he sternly, after a pause. "I will destroy it: then never let her abhorred name be mentioned more amongst us."

Margaret's fingers, however, closed resolutely over the letter, and she gently put aside her father's hand.

"Papa, I must accept Mrs Beaufort's offer. Do not attempt to reason me out of this resolve. Dear papa, should the bondage be too galling, you know I can return home immediately—only suffer me to make the experiment."

Mr Desmond fixed his eyes earnestly on his daughter's changeful features. Tears stood in Margaret's eyes; and her face, flushed with emotion, was anxiously turned towards him.

"Margaret, are you mad? Can it be that you seriously propose to me to consent that you should place yourself in the power of that hard unscrupulous woman?" exclaimed Mr Desmond, at length.

"Let us not refuse the assistance Mrs Beaufort so ungraciously tenders, papa. Our distress, and perhaps a feeling of self-reproach likewise, have evidently softened her heart towards us; else why

should not your appeal have been disregarded like the former one? Let me try to be her companion: perhaps I may win her to more gentleness. There must be some accessible spot in her heart."

"After Mrs Beaufort's insulting allusions to your mother, Margaret, you plead in vain. If you go to Methwold it will be in defiance of my wish. Without sacrificing my daughter, I hope to be able to repay the sum we owe," interrupted Mr Desmond decisively, turning away with darkened brow.

"Nay, listen to me, papa; for I cannot consent to dismiss Mrs Beaufort and her offer so unceremoniously," resumed Margaret firmly. "It is an undeniable fact that by some means our income must be increased. That this cannot be achieved without a sacrifice of some sort I suppose you will allow. Can you suggest a more feasible project than the one I propose?"

"I will not permit my daughter to be oppressed by an unprincipled woman like Agatha Beaufort. Let us change the subject, Margaret. You cannot alter my decision."

Miss Desmond did not immediately reply; but there lurked a quiet determination in her eye and manner, which showed that, though for the moment

silenced, she was not convinced of the wisdom of her father's decision.

"My dear Mr Desmond, if Margaret has quite set her heart on making Mrs Beaufort's acquaintance, I think it would be wrong to prevent her. Her residence at Methwold Abbey will open to her a much wider sphere than she can ever expect at home," interposed Mrs Desmond, looking up from her work; and speaking for the first time since Margaret's entrance into the room.

"It will open to her a sphere of degradation! Mrs Beaufort uses less ceremony in inviting my daughter to her house than she would employ in hiring her lowest menial. Poor Agnes! her child shall not be sacrificed!"

"Margaret could return home again, you know, Mr Desmond, if she found Mrs Beaufort's society intolerable. But in my opinion she will become a great favourite at the Abbey."

"Pshaw! spoken like a true woman; who profoundly believes whatever she wishes, however improbable! But I little dreamed to find apologists for Agatha Beaufort around my own hearth," exclaimed Mr Desmond angrily.

"Nay; we do not advocate Mrs Beaufort's cause,

dear papa: but since some sacrifice of independence must be made, is it not better to accept that which we have a right to claim at her hands, rather than be indebted to a stranger? Is it not easier, dear papa, for me to submit to a temporary bondage under Mrs Beaufort—which the act of quitting Methwold would terminate—rather than to a life of perpetual restraint by becoming George Compton's wife?" And Margaret knelt by her father's chair, and her soft arms twined themselves caressingly round his neck.

"Your marrying George Compton, Margaret, you know is quite out of the question; but——"

"What do you say then, papa, to my seeking an engagement as a governess, until our affairs are in a more prosperous condition?" quickly resumed Margaret, vigorously pursuing her point.

"Nonsense, Margaret! you weary me with your importunity. One would imagine that you had some weighty personal interest in the matter," rejoined Mr Desmond impatiently; and his eyes riveted themselves keenly on his daughter's blushing cheek.

"And so she has, Mr Desmond: Margaret wishes to avoid George Compton's assiduities. After all, if she does not like Methwold, she is not obliged to remain; therefore making Mrs Beaufort's acquaint-

ance need not be the terrible ordeal you imagine. You will be sure to meet Mr Somerton at Methwold, Margaret," exclaimed Mrs Desmond in her most even tones, still intently plying her needle.

A deep blush suffused Margaret's face; and her eyes fell beneath her father's sudden glance of astonishment.

"Oh, mamma, ——"

"If Margaret, or you my dear, have any design to elevate Mr Somerton into George Compton's rival, it strikes me that the shortest way to clinch the matter would be to open negotiations at once, whilst he is at Woodthorpe: the affair, believe me, could be adjusted with much greater regard to Margaret's interest than when she has entered upon her menial duties at the Abbey. Your project, my dear, is as rare and unique as Agatha's matchless arrogance in commanding my daughter to conceal her relationship to her!" observed Mr Desmond impetuously, rising and quitting the room.

Margaret sat motionless: the energy which enabled her to combat her father's displeasure seemed fading away, and yielding to that feeling of listless apathy which at once defies and disregards a dreaded future. Mrs Beaufort's letter lay open on the table

before her; and as Margaret's eye mechanically glanced over her stern, harsh sentences, a chill of despairing repugnance overpowered her, and she was tempted to contend no more for that which promised so unprofitable a termination. Tears of wounded pride rolled down her cheeks, as she presently reperused it slowly and carefully: but Margaret, though sensitively alive to its cutting taunts, felt not humbled. Hers was one of those rare minds, not over-confident in its own merit, yet sufficiently endowed with firmness and self-respect to repel such a feeling as unworthy. Though nothing could be meeker or more retiring than Margaret's ordinary demeanour, the pure truth and rectitude which guided her actions lent to her character a simple dignity, both in thought and deed, surpassing that arising from a consciousness of the most legitimate of outward sources to challenge homage and consideration.

Mrs Desmond, meanwhile, noticed not her fair young daughter's abstraction; being absorbed by the needle-work in her hand, and in contemplating various schemes for the future: all and each of which, to her vivid fancy, presented innumerable advantages easily realized; and so halycon in their results,

that the only difficulty subsisting in Mrs Desmond's mind was, to decide which to propose first. It never occurred to her, however, but that Margaret considered her father's warmly expressed opinion on the subject of Mrs Beaufort's invitation, final.

At length, Margaret arose and quitted the room, and Mrs Desmond saw her join her father in the garden. Wondering not a little at her daughter's courage and pertinacity—for in any domestic contest there was a dry abruptness and irony in her husband's manner, peculiarly daunting to a person of her sanguine temperament—Mrs Desmond removed her chair to the window, and for some twenty minutes watched their deportment.

Margaret then quickly returned to the house; her mother listened to her hasty step as she ascended the stairs. Soon she returned to the room with her writing-desk in her hand, and the expression of her face hovering between smiles and tears.

"Mamma, I shall at length be of some use to you. Papa has given me permission to encounter this terrible Mrs Beaufort, and allows me to answer her letter," exclaimed Margaret, as she seated herself at the table, and opened her desk.

Mrs Desmond did not reply; but she approached,

fondly kissed her daughter's cheek, and threw her arms lovingly around her. Margaret hurriedly returned the caress; then she buried her face on her mother's bosom, and wept.

It was after no little resolute perseverance, and plainly stating to her father her determination not to remain at home living in idleness, whilst his income continued in so straitened a condition, that Margaret had at length wrung from Mr Desmond his reluctant assent to her project. Every argument she could advance, Margaret put forth to subdue her father's prejudices; whose proud exclusiveness shrank from the idea of his daughter having recourse, even in their necessitous circumstances, to personal exertions of any description.

Mr Desmond's misfortunes had rather tended to increase than otherwise the morbid sensitiveness of that false pride, fostered by the influences of his long residence at Methwold Abbey, which under reverse of fortune perceived degradation in the diligent exercise of those mental talents and resources which might have so greatly ameliorated his position. Sooner than admit in practice that his pretensions, and the place he had hitherto occupied in society, were above his means to support, Mr Desmond had

been content to withdraw from the world, and struggle on with poverty in listless inaction; provided that his complacent ideas of his dignity were not disturbed, or his pride lowered by the exchange of his profession for one less aristocratic perhaps, though more lucrative, and better adapted to his position. So greatly did this mistaken pride influence Mr Desmond, that he found less humiliation in yielding to his daughter's solicitations, and applying for relief from his difficulties to Mrs Beaufort, after her repeated slights, than in descending from his imaginary sphere manfully to wrestle with them himself.

Not so, however, Margaret: she saw no disgrace or loss of real dignity in employing the talents she possessed, and making them subservient to her own support, and that of those around her. At the same time she keenly felt, what all who fall from a more exalted sphere must feel, when reduced to make personal exertion to eke out a livelihood: but, though she mourned its necessity, she did not, like her father, shrink from realizing and performing the duty.

Margaret, therefore, clearly and forcibly expressed her views on the subject to Mr Desmond; who, finding her fully determined, despite his remonstrances, to act up to her principles—and also believing it to be

desirable, on Mr Compton's account, that she should leave Woodthorpe for a season — thought it less degrading to his daughter to accept the home, however contemptuously offered by his haughty relative, rather than seek a dependence amongst strangers.

CHAPTER IV.

GRAVE and anxious were Margaret's thoughts when she retired to her room for the night, on the day her letter to Mrs Beaufort had been despatched. The agitation which oppressed her during the day had partially subsided, and the silence and darkness fell soothingly around her. Yet Margaret's meditations were very sorrowful, when she reflected on the kind home and loving hearts she was about to abandon for the hard bondage awaiting her at Methwold Abbey.

From her childhood, the name of Mrs Beaufort had been associated in idea with everything harsh and terrible; and well she remembered listening, with throbbing heart and burning resentment, to the first recital her father volunteered of the unkindness he had sustained at his cousin's hands. Yet strange

and inexplicable was it to Margaret, that, apart from her natural sorrow at leaving home, the knowledge that she was deliberately placing herself under the protection of this dreaded Mrs Beaufort, brought with it no corresponding feelings of repugnance and awe.

Margaret's disposition was one essentially sanguine. Sorrow and disappointments had not yet quenched her spirit, or prostrated her energies; so, buoyed with the hope of accomplishing that which she had so much at heart—to effect a reconciliation between Mr Desmond and his cousin, and at the same time to aid her father in his difficulties by personal exertion—she nerved herself with no common resolution for the experiment she had resolved to hazard.

Good, pure, and self-denying as were these motives of Margaret's for her contemplated sacrifice, there still slumbered in the depths of her heart a hidden prompting—a powerful impulse—to exchange her quiet home for Methwold Abbey: so clothed, however, and disguised under the broad mantle of expediency and duty, that, could her secret by any process have been analyzed and exposed, no one would have beheld its revelation with feelings more indignantly incredulous than herself. Leading a life of almost utter seclusion, unconsciously Margaret's

girlish imagination had been smitten by the qualities which adorned Mr Somerton's character. Throughout the village of Woodthorpe, and indeed as far as her own personal knowledge of the neighbourhood went, Margaret had never heard his name mentioned unaccompanied by words of applause and admiration. Her youthful fancy was captivated by these reputed qualities, united to a person and manner eminently fascinating and graceful—a prepossession against which, her retired, nun-like life offered no antidote in the shape of contrast with other men.

Margaret had never exchanged a word in her life with Mr Somerton—scarcely even the most trifling passing salutation; but instinctively she felt there was that in the tone of his mind which would sympathize with her own. To be known to him, therefore, had long been her secret desire; the gratification of which she thought would be more easily accomplished at Methwold: as Dingley Grange, the place Sir James Somerton had relinquished to his son on his coming of age, was in the immediate vicinity of the Abbey. In short, merely on report, without personal knowledge whatsoever, Mr Somerton was the hero whom Margaret's ardent imagination invested with a halo of brilliant qualities; and

unknowingly, he at length became the standard by which she measured others. Reports of his kindness and benevolence met her from all quarters. The household at Woodthorpe Park spoke of their young master with enthusiastic devotion; regretted his departure, and celebrated his return amongst them again as a day of jubilee. With kindling cheek she read of his brilliant triumphs in the House; and when beside this popularity and homage she contrasted the softer shades of his character—his devotion to his invalid mother, and his unselfish disregard of personal interest to benefit others—her admiration was augmented tenfold.

There was but one disagreeable sensation that Margaret ever remembered experiencing in conjunction with Leonard Somerton's name; this was, when her mother so suddenly alluded to his reported engagement to Miss Berners—a rumour she did her best to dismiss from her mind as improbable, on the strength of the prevailing opinion in the neighbourhood, that as long as Lady Mary Somerton lived, her son would never marry.

The next few days brought the Desmonds another stately epistle from Mrs Beaufort; couched, nevertheless, in more gracious terms. The letter, more-

over, contained the important announcement that the first instalment of Mr Desmond's pension would be transmitted the day following his daughter's arrival at the Abbey: to cease when she left it; and concluded with a hope that Miss Desmond would find much at Methwold to compensate for the loss of her home.

The bustle and excitement of preparation for her departure, detracted greatly from Margaret's grief at leaving Woodthorpe; yet still she suffered acutely at the prospect of this first separation from her beloved parents. However sanguine were her hopes of the good she would ultimately effect, by the magical influence of her sunny smile and gentle pleading, she could not help being sensitively alive to the terrors besetting her *dêbut* at Methwold; nor meditate on her approaching introduction to the terrible Mrs Beaufort, without experiencing a very natural and intense degree of trepidation.

Nothing could exceed the sorrow and disappointment of Mr Compton and his family, when Margaret's approaching departure was announced: indeed, the same feeling was universally shared by all her friends; for her sweetness of disposition had rendered her deservedly popular in the village.

Many, therefore, were the expressions of affectionate regret which greeted Margaret, on the Sunday previous to her departure, on her road from church.

Much to her discomfiture, however, George Compton joined her, and persisted in accompanying her home: he offered his arm; but, annoyed at his unremitting efforts to attract her notice, Margaret declined to take it. Mr Compton coloured, but still continued walking by her side. Margaret hastened onwards, and was meditating on the most polite method of bidding her companion farewell, when she heard a step behind her, and in a moment or two, Mr Somerton passed. He raised his hat, and Margaret felt her colour waver under the earnest gaze he bent, first upon herself and then on her companion.

At the small gate, a few yards distant, leading to the terrace walk skirting the park, from whence a footpath diverged straight to the mansion, Mr Somerton paused, again earnestly looked at her, and then pursued his way. Margaret glanced at Mr Compton, and a feeling of painful embarrassment caused her to turn aside, as she met his eyes fixed upon her with sorrowful earnestness. He did not address her again; but when they reached the gate leading to the footpath, he abruptly bade her

farewell; and, much to Margaret's relief, paid no more visits to her father before her departure.

The following few days passed swiftly and wearily away; as hours preceding any momentous event or change in life always do. Margaret's first impulse, when she arose on the morning appointed by Mrs Beaufort for her journey to Methwold, was to approach the window, and gaze sorrowfully without.

A deep snow had fallen during the night, and lay on the ground in masses pure and dazzling as crystal, contrasting beautifully with the blue sky as the sunlight shone. Icicles drooped like pendent diamonds from the boughs of the trees, sparkling even to the smallest twig in a delicate fretwork of ice. Here and there, a stately fir or cedar tree, partially casting off its snowy mantle, stood proudly forth, stretching its dark fan-like branches of sombre green, and relieving the glaring brilliancy of the scene. Margaret lingered at the window: her home, and the old familiar landscape around it had never before seemed so dear or so alluring as it did on this morning, when she was about to say a long farewell; and with an aching heart she completed her toilette, and descended to the breakfast parlour. The meal over, Margaret

and her father departed immediately for the railway station at the neighbouring town. Little was said during their drive thither. Margaret's heart felt too full for words; and Mr Desmond, uneasy and dissatisfied with himself for permitting his consent to the journey to have been extorted, talked little: save emphatically to admonish his daughter to return unhesitatingly to her home, as soon as she had the slightest cause to regret having been induced to leave it. To satisfy her father, Margaret promised, in lighter tones than the sorrow she was really suffering warranted, that whenever Mrs Beaufort's conduct rendered her residence at Methwold insupportable, she would implicitly obey his injunctions.

It was not until after she had exchanged her last farewell with her father, and the train was slowly put in motion, that Margaret began to realize the full cost and bitterness of the experiment she had so pertinaciously resolved to hazard. She drew down her veil, and for the first half-hour wept bitterly; utterly regardless of the astonishment her sorrow might occasion her fellow-passengers: who, she observed on entering the carriage, consisted only of a lady and gentleman, occupying seats at its opposite end. She was, however, too miserable

and absorbed in her reverie to notice the deportment or peculiarities of her companions; and for many miles silence remained unbroken. At length the lady suddenly, and without previously intimating her intention, let down the window-glass; an operation calling forth the most unequivocal growl of dismay from her opposite neighbour. A conversation thereupon ensued between the two; which, despite her distress, irresistibly provoked Margaret's laughter and curiosity; and for the first time she threw back her veil, and attentively surveyed her companions.

The one was a fat middle-aged lady clad in deep mourning, her black ribbons and bonnet somewhat subduing the ruddy hue of her complexion,—a bloom perhaps deepened by the indignation evoked by her neighbour's remonstrance. The expression of her face, when nothing went contrary, might perhaps have indicated a certain degree of easy good-nature; for her features were large, well developed, and harmonized together; but now there was an irritability in the glance of her sharp black eyes, and something particularly provoking in the ironical smile which curled the corners of her mouth, as the gentleman in support of his argument pointed to the snow-flakes that

had already drifted through the window, and settled upon the huge black silk cloak flung across her.

There was something, however, so peculiarly strange and singular in the appearance and deportment of the gentleman, her opponent, that Margaret's eyes involuntarily riveted themselves in amazement upon him. He was of diminutive stature, and of a thin spare figure; his complexion was fair, slightly inclined to sallowness, of that peculiar unhealthy hue produced either by recent sickness, or by long residence in a tropical clime; his features were small and strongly marked with small-pox; the nose *retroussé*, and the mouth wide. His eyes were long, of a pale grey hue, and deeply set in the head, peering from under the heavy overhanging brow with a quick cunning expression. His forehead had a slight habitual contraction, and was shaded by a profusion of sandy-coloured hair, straying over the brow in a most refractory manner, and evidently unaccustomed to a very frequent application of brush, comb, or pomatum.

The apparel of the strange little man, nevertheless, evinced a greater regard to personal adornment; though the *tout ensemble* unluckily combined to render tenfold more conspicuous an ugliness to which Margaret's experience of the world and its inhabitants

offered as yet no parallel. He was muffled up to the chin in a scarf of the brightest scarlet cashmere, while his diminutive figure was enveloped in a huge woollen roquelaure of scarlet, and black plaid lined with the finest sable, and fastened by a clasp across the chest. A book lay open upon his knee: his travelling cap, also scarlet velvet edged by a band of sable, was tossed aside, and thrown amidst a heap of newspapers and packages on the adjoining seat.

"Well, madam, the next time you travel in the depth of winter, I advise you to take your place in a third class carriage; where you may have air to your heart's content,—besides wind, rain, and snow, *ad libitum*, without endangering the lives of your fellow-passengers!" angrily exclaimed the unknown, in a voice surprisingly loud and sonorous, as the irate lady again resisted his endeavour to draw up the glass, by placing her hand across the window-frame.

"I don't want your advice, sir, on a matter in which I can please myself: though it strikes me also, that people who muffle themselves up until they look like a bale of carpet, and who fly into a passion at breathing a whiff of pure air, should either stay at

home, or take a carriage, and box themselves up alone!" responded the lady, in tones of dogged contempt.

"A whiff of pure air! You must be mad, madam. Another hour's experience of this delightful breeze will find us metamorphosed into frozen statues, grinning at each other like Egyptian sphinxes! Were you ever in Egypt, madam?" The lady vouchsafed no other notice of this query save an indignant shrug of the shoulders. Her unknown antagonist then resumed in tones of deeper exasperation, as the storm which had been gradually gathering now burst forth, and large flakes of snow whirled past the window in rapid, dazzling circles. "I am surprised, madam, that your years have not taught you greater prudence: but one may as well try to drive a stubborn camel, as to teach some women wisdom. Don't you know, ma'am, that her most gracious Majesty's great-grandfather died from exposure to a draught?" and the unknown proceeded to envelop himself from head to foot in his cloak, and still fixed his sharp piercing eyes on his opponent's face, to see how she bore this last attack.

Margaret now interposed—perceiving by the sullen

offended air with which the lady turned away, and deliberately took a book from her travelling reticule, that she did not intend to be rated into compliance, or to take compassion on the evidently shivering condition of her irritable neighbour—and in her usual kind tone of voice offered to change places with the unknown: the more so, as her shawl and a variety of parcels filled the seat opposite to her own; thus excluding the unfortunate gentleman from any chance of escaping the draught he appeared so intensely to dread.

There was something in the sound of Margaret's voice—perhaps it might be its contrast with the rough harsh accents of his obdurate neighbour opposite—which made the unknown turn and survey her with a glance so prolonged and earnest, that, half offended at his uncivil reception of her offer, she averted her head; resolved to make no further attempt to play the amiable to individuals so unpromising as both her companions. At length, after a pause of some minutes, the unknown gentleman signified in very audible tones his intention of accepting her proffered civility; then gathering up the folds of his cloak, and selecting several newspapers from the heap by his side, he arose. Mar-

garet silently complied, though she felt inclined to resent the impertinent scrutiny again bestowed upon her face and figure by the eccentric little man.

Until they reached the next station the belligerents pretended to be absorbed by their books. As soon as the train stopped, the lady, uttering an ejaculation of thankfulness that her journey was ended, left the carriage; when, to Margaret's astonishment and alarm, the unknown darted into the seat the former had just quitted, and without the slightest apology thrust himself before her; and putting his head out of the window, despite the unpropitious state of the elements, vociferously hailed a porter. He next abruptly turned towards her and demanded how far she was going to travel. Margaret, in extreme amazement, replied that she was going to Denbridge. A complacent smile beamed on the little man's face; then, turning to the porter who now stood at the carriage door, he thrust something into his hand, exclaiming—

"There! go and take four tickets for Denbridge. Now don't stand staring like an idiot, man! Do you understand? I want four tickets: and mind, tell the guard that this whole carriage is taken, and he is not to admit a soul into it until we get to Denbridge!

You don't catch me travelling again with a plethoric old dowager, floundering like a whale in shallow water at the sight of a closed window!" murmured he, as he sank back again into his seat.

The porter presently returned with the tickets. With the most ungracious mien the strange little gentleman snatched them from the man's hand, then desiring him to keep any change there might be, he tossed the tickets on the opposite seat, and with an impatient wave of the hand drew up the window-glass.

Half frightened and half amused, Margaret sat wondering what her companion would do or say next; and, to tell the truth, not a little dismayed at the prospect of a two hours' tête-à-tête with him. Lounging back in the carriage, however, and comfortably wrapped in the ample folds of his roquelaure, a meditative mood seemed to have replaced his late excitement; and, but that now and then she caught his eyes riveted on her face with the same earnest scrutiny before so displeasing to her, Margaret might have concluded that her strange friend was now as little desirous to attract her attention as she was to be entertained by his conversation.

"So, young lady, the Denbridge station is your *ultima thule* this morning?" exclaimed he abruptly.

Margaret coldly bowed: nevertheless, she raised her eyes with curiosity to her companion's face; so different was the inflection of his voice from its previous uninviting tones.

"I am going as far as Denbridge also. It is lucky that we met. I thought that you belonged to the old woman in black whom we have just turned out, as you tried so amiably to atone for her abominable obstinacy. All stubborn old hags ought to undergo the Grand Seignior's discipline of the sack and the Bosphorus! But how cold you look!" and without further ceremony the whimsical old man seized a cloak and wrapped it round Margaret. "I know a great deal about Denbridge and its inhabitants. Is your home there, young lady?"

Startled and surprised by the abruptness of the action, and the quaint kindness of her companion's words and manner, Margaret had not time to reply, before the unknown impatiently repeated his question; though in tones more peremptory than before.

"I have no friends at Denbridge," at length replied Margaret, coldly.

"Do your friends then reside in its neighbourhood?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Margaret demurely; amused, though not liking the freedom of the question.

"You believe so! Cannot you state plainly whether the fact is so or not, young lady? That pretty face, and those tearful eyes, if I am not mistaken, tell a tale that this journey of yours is the reverse of a pleasurable one. I live near Denbridge, as I before told you: so if it is in my power to be of any assistance in seeking out these friends, believe me, my dear young lady, it will give me very great pleasure to be useful to you, in this or any other way in which you may please to command my services!"

Notwithstanding the oddity and abruptness of the offer, there was a cordial kindness in the stranger's tone, which again made Margaret survey him with astonishment. He smiled as he caught her puzzled look.

"Thank you. I believe I shall not require assistance on arriving at Denbridge. I am going from thence to Methwold Abbey," replied Margaret promptly; for, as her companion announced himself a resident in the vicinity of Denbridge, a hope arose,

that the dread and respect she was told the stately Mrs Beaufort inspired in that neighbourhood, might awe him into more reserve of manner. For some minutes it appeared as if her design was achieved; for her companion threw himself thoughtfully back, and again indulged himself with a leisurely survey of her face.

"Have the goodness to write your name here, young lady!" at length exclaimed the unknown, with a suddenness that made Margaret start; putting into her hand a set of exquisitely carved and jewelled tablets. "You need not look so scared! I have seldom to request a young lady's autograph in vain," resumed he, with a sarcastic smile.

More and more confounded, Margaret's dignity succumbed—as that of many of her superiors both in age and wisdom has done, and will do again—before an audacious assurance alike impervious to rebuke or discountenance; and she very literally did as she was desired.

"Margaret Desmond! Humph! An uncommonly pretty name, young lady;" and so saying her unknown friend relapsed into his former meditative mood; after carefully closing the tablets, and putting them back again into his pocket.

A long silence ensued. At length Margaret,

whose thoughts perpetually dwelt on her dreaded *début* at Methwold, ventured to ask her companion whether he knew Mrs Beaufort.

"Know her!" responded the unknown, rousing with sudden vehemence. "Know her! Agatha Beaufort and myself are very intimate friends. I live about four miles from the Abbey, consequently we often meet."

"I have heard such varied reports of Mrs Beaufort's character, that I cannot at all picture to myself the kind of personage she is," resumed Margaret timidly, after a pause.

"Indeed! Did you ever hear any good of her, young lady? However, as you appear to be in such happy ignorance of Agatha Beaufort's disposition, pray may I inquire in what capacity you are now proceeding to Methwold Abbey?" asked the unknown, peremptorily.

Margaret hesitated; for she thought the question a very impertinent one; nevertheless, she presently replied frankly,—

"I am going to Methwold to be Mrs Beaufort's companion; therefore it cannot surprise you that I seek to obtain some insight into her character."

Her new friend, however, did not seem to sympathize much in her feelings on the subject; for a dark frown knit his brow, and a strange light glimmered in his small brilliant eyes, as with an irritable ejaculation he dashed down the window-glass: for the train was slackening its speed preparatory to coming to a halt at an adjacent station.

"These frequent stoppages are detestable," exclaimed he angrily, putting his head out of the window. "Do you see that black, lofty-looking hidalgo yonder, young lady? Well, he is one pre-eminently favoured with Mrs Beaufort's countenance. Look!"

Margaret obeyed; and was greeted with the not very uncommon spectacle of a gentleman of tall commanding figure, who had evidently left a carriage to pace up and down the platform until the train was again ready to start. In a few minutes the gentleman turned his head; then, despite Margaret's self-possession, the colour deepened on her cheek, and involuntarily she exclaimed,

"Mr Somerton!"

Presently Mr Somerton passed the carriage in which she sat. He glanced into it, then slightly

raised his hat and bowed; but Margaret felt uncertain whether his recognition was intended for herself or her companion. She was, however, speedily roused from her reverie thereupon, by the unpleasant consciousness that the latter's eyes were fixed upon her with a very chilling expression of distrust.

"Pray, young lady, how is it that you are acquainted with Mr Somerton, if your circumstances are such as to oblige you to become Agatha Beaufort's companion?" demanded he at length, slowly.

Margaret again felt inclined to resent the inquiry; but still there had been throughout a kindly interest in the old man's tone and manner, which, in spite of his curiosity, and the repulsive bluntness of his mode of asking her questions, irresistibly impelled her to reply. Margaret during her short life had hitherto excited little interest in the feelings of others, yet so earnest was her desire to be loved and appreciated, that perhaps few girls were more liable than herself to be betrayed into the error of imagining any flattering notice they may receive from comparative strangers to be real and genuine sympathy; while in reality it is too frequently tendered for the gratification of a wayward curiosity, or for lack of better or more exciting employ-

ment. In a very few words, then, Margaret explained, with a degree of bashful confusion for which she afterwards severely chid herself, that she knew Mr Somerton merely by seeing him occasionally at Woodthorpe, but that she had never exchanged a word with him; and erelong she had the satisfaction of perceiving that her explanation chased the frown from her strange friend's brow. There was a question, however, which Margaret longed to ask, and she now resolutely put it.

"Mr Somerton, I understand, is engaged to marry a relation of Mrs Beaufort's. Of course you are well acquainted with Miss Berners?" Margaret paused. "You will perhaps think me very inquisitive; but as Miss Berners is an inmate of the Abbey, I wish you would describe her to me," added she earnestly.

There was something unpleasantly satirical in the laugh with which her companion replied,—

"Miss Berners, take my word for it, is *not* engaged to marry Mr Somerton; but only wishes she may be. Mrs Beaufort, however, intends to accomplish it; therefore mind what you are about, young lady: not that there would be much chance of your rivalling Alice Berners—a creature bright as

a flash of lightning, wild and fitful as a Banshee woman, all passion and sentiment, sunshine and tears. Nevertheless, I would advise you not to try, as you are doubtless aware that Leonard Somerton is worth contending for; and it strikes me that the brilliant Alice would make a magnificent Roxana. In short, Miss—Miss Desmond, or whatever your name may be, don't be such a little fool as to attempt to enact the rôle of Statira. Methwold Abbey, after all, is a pleasant place enough. There are, to be sure, a few pitfalls, which need not signify, you know, if you have wit to steer clear of them. However, after you have been at Methwold six months or so, should you happen to wish for the skill of a sybil, ask me; and it will be hard if we cannot then read a riddle or two together, even though Agatha Beaufort be its theme. But here we are at Denbridge," exclaimed Margaret's unknown friend, as the train suddenly came to a stand-still. "I suppose you will find an emissary from Mrs Beaufort ready to receive you on the platform. Keep up your spirits, young lady, and remember that sometimes might yields to right!" and with this enigmatical speech the little gentleman politely handed

his young companion from the carriage, and with a profound bow bade her farewell.

For a few minutes Margaret stood confused and bewildered by the noise and bustle around her. The impression left by the tone and manner of her companion's parting admonition, conveyed also a pang of sadness to her heart. She was, however, speedily aroused from her reverie, by the approach of a personage of very important exterior, dressed in black; who, after a few preliminary inquiries, introduced herself as Mrs Beaufort's maid, Cartaret, and announced that a carriage was in waiting to convey Miss Desmond to the Abbey. Whilst Cartaret was delivering her message, Mr Somerton passed: but whether he perceived her or not, Margaret could not satisfactorily decide, as he exhibited no token of recognition; nor did he acknowledge the profound courtesy of Mrs Beaufort's confidential attendant.

"Who is that gentleman wearing the scarlet cloak?" asked Margaret, when seated in the carriage tête-à-tête with Cartaret, as they drove past the portico in front of the station-house; on the steps of which stood her unknown friend, directing in no very gentle tones the labour of two men-servants,

and some half-dozen porters, in putting on his carriage the formidable array of luggage strewed about.

Cartaret bent a shrewd inquiring glance on Margaret's face; she then replied in rather scornful tones,

"That gentleman is Mr Carnegie of the Holt; a personage whose abrupt, dictatorial manner is highly offensive to my mistress, Mrs Beaufort."

CHAPTER V.

THE inflexion of Cartaret's voice, as she replied to Margaret's last question, was so firm and decided, that it failed not to indicate to her, as perhaps it was intended to do, that Mrs Beaufort's opinions were regarded as decisive, and acted upon as oracles by her obsequious household.

The implied hint, combined with Cartaret's presuming airs, and the manner in which she deliberately surveyed Margaret from head to foot as soon as they had passed from the noise and confusion of the railway-station, were circumstances the reverse of encouraging to our heroine. Tired and weary as she was, however, Margaret's spirit rose; turning coolly aside, she inquired after Mrs Beaufort's health, and then reclined back in the corner of the carriage, determined to make herself as comfortable as cir-

cumstances might permit. Cartaret responded in the same dry tones, and for some time afterwards neither spoke; though Margaret more than once detected the woman's eyes eagerly fixed upon her.

Wondering from what cause this curiosity arose, Margaret in her turn leisurely surveyed her conductress. There was a reserved, sinister expression in Cartaret's face which struck Margaret as peculiarly repulsive. Her features were harsh and hard, and her low forehead and thick eyebrows imparted a lowering, set expression to her features. Her eyes were black, and restless in their glance. Her voice was low; and words glided from her lips unvaried by the slightest alteration of tone.

Disregarding Margaret's evident disinclination to converse, Cartaret presently began officiously to point out and descant upon the various objects of interest on their route; but, silent and depressed, Margaret's attention was not thoroughly roused until, after a drive of almost an hour or more, the carriage stopped before a lofty stone archway by the road-side.

A pair of tall iron gates then opened on one of the principal approaches to the Abbey; and Margaret, as she was rapidly whirled through, gazed on the scene she had so frequently heard her father describe.

The beautiful undulating park was now clothed in dazzling snow,—clear, bright, and crystalline as the water-drops clustering in festoons on the branches of the trees. The road after a time lay through pine woods some mile or two in length, looking gloomy and black as the afternoon shadows stole over them: but now and then a break in the dull foliage of the trees afforded Margaret a wider survey over the snowy landscape. Woods and hills were brilliant with dazzling crystals; though at intervals the eye was relieved from the excessive glare of the snow by patches of brightest verdure, encircling some giant oak, or crowning a distant height, upon which groups of sheep were browsing. Woods, apparently of vast extent and growth, bounded the horizon, gradually rising in dark undulating lines from the valley, in the centre of which the mansion stood. A lake lay in front of the house, winding capriciously through the valley amidst groves of oak and beech trees; which, in the summer season, dipped their bright green foliage into the water. On the summit of a hill sloping to the water's edge, boldly prominent on a background of trees, stood the ruins of the ancient nunnery of Methwold.

The mansion was a stately, imposing edifice of con-

siderable extent, built of dark-grey stone. Its front consisted of a lofty central tower with high embattled parapet, having two other towers of nearly the same dimensions at each extremity of the façade. The windows were pointed, with richly decorated mouldings, and the porch of the mansion projected sufficiently to allow a carriage to draw up beneath it. It was square, surmounted by pinnacles; its centre decorated by the armorial insignia of the Beauforts, and the whole ornamented with various fanciful devices. Over the porch was a large mullioned window of painted glass, blazoning the coats of arms, quarterings, and heraldic badges of the Beauforts for centuries back. The parapet of this window, which lighted the hall, was of open stone-work of exquisite design, displaying the words "Deo data," the motto of the family.

Margaret, however, had now very brief leisure to survey the outward magnificence of Methwold Abbey, for the carriage suddenly stopped before a small side-door. Cartaret instantly got out of the carriage and helped Margaret to alight; then she led the way through a lofty stone corridor into the hall. An enormous wood-fire blazed in the grate, beside which Cartaret requested Margaret to wait whilst she announced her arrival to Mrs Beaufort.

For a few minutes after Cartaret disappeared, Margaret stood absorbed in reverie. She was now under the roof beneath which her father's earliest and most prosperous years had been spent; and yet, joyless and solitary she stood, feeling even more desolate and crushed at heart in this home of her kindred, than if from strangers, alike both in blood and sympathy, she had experienced so chill a reception. The thought then of her mother's wrongs and humiliations flashed across her; and deeply and fervently did Margaret vow never to be betrayed into the smallest concession, or a line of action unworthy of that much-enduring, gentle parent, however greatly her haughty relative might be propitiated thereby.

No longer sustained by the excitement of combating her father's fears and misgivings, Margaret realized more thoroughly than she had ever done before, the bitterness of the dependant position she had accepted; and an indignant flush suffused her face as she marked how well and speedily Mrs Beaufort took occasion to demonstrate to her poor friendless cousin, how far she considered herself bound in kindness and courtesy by the cold hard promise in her letter, "that Miss Desmond should

occupy in Mrs Beaufort's household the same rank and position which her mother before her marriage would there have been entitled to hold."

Half an hour elapsed, and still Margaret remained where Cartaret left her; with no pleasanter companion than her thoughts, cheered by no kindly word of affection and welcome. She sat near the fire; her head bent low and her hands supporting her forehead, over which masses of shining ringlets drooped.

At length she raised her head and gazed round; for the silence of the lofty old hall, unbroken save by the measured tick of the huge clock, was becoming oppressive. The fire had burned low; yet despite the gathering gloom, light enough remained to enable Margaret to survey distinctly every object around.

Opposite to her arose the gorgeous painted window; and on either side of it, depended from the groined roof, banners and trophies gloriously won by many a hero of her race. Ancient armour grouped in fanciful devices covered the walls. The floor was of dark oak, contrasting its colour with the rich crimson of the soft carpets traversing its polished surface. At one end of the hall stood an organ. A gallery, with a curiously carved parapet, displaying a variety of grotesque figures, busts, and medallions, mingled

with greyhounds (the badge of the Beauforts) bearing shields, emblazoned with the family arms and cognizance, partly surrounded the hall. A billiard-table, an ancient cabinet, and a carved oak buffet, on which stood two large porphyry vases filled with flowers, also attracted Margaret's attention: but, fatigued and weary, she presently turned away and resumed her old position near the fire, wondering when Mrs Beaufort would condescend to admit her to her presence.

Margaret had scarcely relapsed into reverie when a door opened hastily at the end of the hall, and a step advanced towards her. She hurriedly rose from her seat, expecting to confront no less a personage than her formidable cousin, Mrs Beaufort. Great therefore was Margaret's relief to find herself mistaken; though soon every feeling merged in admiration and delight, as her gaze fell on the graceful, bright young form before her.

Just within the doorway stood a young girl, her slight figure thrown vividly prominent by the dark rich hues of the oak panelling, and the crimson draperies behind her, upon which the firelight shone. She slowly advanced; then Margaret felt the full eloquence of the pair of brilliant hazel eyes fixed

upon her with searching scrutiny; a gaze varying in its expression—one moment keen, flashing, penetrating, the next, gentle and subdued. Long silken eyelashes, black as jet, drooped coquettishly at times over her cheek, which bloomed with the loveliest, the freshest pink imaginable. Her nose was small and delicately formed; the proud curve of the nostril, and the somewhat saucy arch of the short upper lip, denoted, however, a resolute wilfulness of character which the general expression of the fair face did not tend to disprove. Long ringlets of dark brown hair clustered round a forehead, low, smooth, and bright with intelligence. Her complexion was fair and clear, and her stature above the common height. She was attired in a thin white muslin evening dress, displaying the symmetry of her beautiful shoulders and bust; and a chain of large coral beads encircled her neck. Something of the admiration Margaret felt must have been perceptible on her face, for presently a bright smile parted the rosy lips of the fair young girl, and she advanced quickly and extended her hand.

"I have only just heard of your arrival, and have hastened down as quickly as possible to welcome

you. My maid accidentally met Cartaret, and brought me the news whilst I was dressing. But I am forgetting that I must introduce myself: I am Alice Berners."

Involuntarily Margaret started. That fair radiant face, so beautiful, yet so imperious in its expression, seemed formed to subjugate at will, and to reign despotically over the most insensible heart. A slight blush rose to Miss Berners' cheek, as she encountered the earnest gaze bent upon her; but presently she was busily employed unclasping Margaret's heavy travelling cloak.

"I fear, Miss Desmond, you must consider us very inhospitable. I cannot imagine why Cartaret did not show you at once to your room; but when you have been here a short time you will cease to marvel, as I have long done, at any of her vagaries," resumed Miss Berners, after a brief pause. "I suppose you have not yet seen Mrs Beaufort?"

"Cartaret left me here to apprize her mistress of my arrival, and I am awaiting Mrs Beaufort's summons," replied Margaret.

"Mrs Beaufort seldom admits any one at this hour: besides, this evening she is expecting a large party of friends at dinner. It is now half-past five, there-

fore I feel sure that she will not see you to-night. Let me show you your room."

"You are very kind; but I fear Mrs Beaufort might construe it into a want of respect were I to retire before receiving her message. Do you not think that I had better await here some intimation of her wishes?" replied Margaret, reluctantly, withdrawing her hand from that of her fair companion.

Miss Berners stopped. A slight frown contracted her brow.

"Perhaps you are right. A breach of etiquette is a deadly sin in Mrs Beaufort's sight. I would go myself and remind her of your arrival, only, that when once she has retired within her own apartments, nobody but the privileged Cartaret is authorized to disturb her," replied Alice, hastily throwing down Margaret's cloak. "There is no reason however why we should not make ourselves comfortable, whilst Cartaret recounts her adventures at the Denbridge station to her mistress. Let us draw the ottoman closer to the fire; and, as Mrs Beaufort told me this morning that she expected us to be very good friends, you shall begin and tell me all about yourself, dear Miss Desmond; and then I will relate my

history!" exclaimed Alice, seating herself with pretty negligence by Margaret on the ottoman.

Miss Berners' manner was so playful and cordial, that Margaret felt irresistibly attracted towards her. Perhaps also the warmth of Alice's greeting contrasted gratefully with the inhospitality of her welcome by Mrs Beaufort. Before many words more were exchanged, however, the door opened, and Cartaret advanced towards the two young ladies.

Alice instantly rose.

"What is your message, Cartaret?" demanded she, peremptorily.

"Mrs Beaufort desires her compliments to you, Miss Desmond, and regrets that her engagements will prevent her seeing you before ten o'clock to-morrow morning; at which time she expects that you will hold yourself in readiness for an interview," said Cartaret, delivering her message with the greatest *sang-froid*, and addressing herself exclusively to Margaret.

"Very well, Cartaret. I will show Miss Desmond her rooms. You will have the goodness to give directions that she is supplied there with every neces-

sary comfort after her long journey. Her appetite, I can assure you, Cartaret, will not be the less keen for the extraordinary length of time that you have kept her shivering in this huge hall!" replied Miss Berners impetuously, signing to Margaret to follow her.

"I have been in close attendance on Mrs Beaufort, Miss Alice," replied Cartaret, rather deprecatingly. "Miss Desmond sleeps in the east gallery you know," added she, as she opened the door for the young ladies to pass into the vestibule.

Miss Berners, however, took not the slightest notice of Cartaret's remark; but bounding up stairs, followed by Margaret, she led the way first through numerous lofty galleries, then along a multitude of old-fashioned, curiously contrived passages, evidently the by-ways of the mansion, until she stopped before a low arched door covered with tapestry.

"You see those heavy folding doors at the end of the corridor? they lead into the famous Beaufort portrait-gallery. I tell you, Miss Desmond, that should you grow weary this evening for lack of a companion, or prefer a stroll to going early to bed, you may take your choice of an agreeable *passe-temps*, and inspect a series of gems of art for which

Mrs Beaufort would not take California in exchange!" exclaimed Alice lightly, opening the door before which she had paused.

Margaret then followed her along a narrower and more gloomy corridor than any they had as yet traversed. Its walls were hung with tapestry representing scriptural subjects. At the extreme end of the passage, a long flight of steps descended, as Margaret supposed, to some of the domestic offices; though she did not inquire, as Alice suddenly threw back a heavy door, the only one that opened on the corridor.

"This is your room, Miss Desmond. It seems rather far away and secluded; but I think you will find it very comfortable," exclaimed Alice, passing her arm through Margaret's." You have a lovely view from the windows, and Mrs Beaufort's apartments are near; though her door opens on the grand gallery."

Margaret threw a hasty glance round. The room was a lofty singularly shaped apartment, with hangings and curtains of crimson damask. A capacious bay window, through which the faintest evening twilight now streamed, lighted the room. The fire in the grate had grown dim, and diffused a flickering glare over the room; so that had either

Margaret or her companion been addicted to nervous tremors, the silence and shadowy obscurity around, might easily have beguiled imagination into all manner of superstitious terrors. An almost imperceptible shudder, to say the truth, did pass over Alice's graceful figure as she furtively glanced at the sombre hangings, and round on the more distant parts of the room, every now and then fitfully illumined. Near the fire a table was spread with various refreshments—and within the fender stood a coffee-pot on a small silver tripod. Alice soon stirred the fire into a cheerful blaze; she then lighted the candles, and making Margaret seat herself at the table, poured out some coffee and placed it before her.

"I have not yet shown you the extent of your territory, dear Margaret—for so you must suffer me to call you. See! you have a delightful studio here, to which I shall frequently claim the privilege of admittance," said Alice lightly, bounding across the room, and drawing aside a tapestry curtain. "But you must not explore its mysteries until after my departure. We dine at half-past seven, and I dressed early on purpose to talk with you. In the first place, Margaret, pray tell me if you are a relation of Mrs Beaufort's? I never saw a more striking likeness

than the one you bear to a certain Edith Beaufort, whose portrait hangs in the gallery," exclaimed Miss Berners, returning to the fireside.

The colour rose to Margaret's brow.

"Alice, I am interdicted by Mrs Beaufort from recurring to or conversing with any one at Methwold on the subject of my own personal history," at length replied she, gravely.

" Mystery again! Is your coming likewise, Margaret, connected with the strange things which have happened here of late?" exclaimed Miss Berners impetuously.

" There is nothing mysterious so far as I am concerned; except that, for reasons best known to herself, Mrs Beaufort desired me never to allude to my family. How did she mention me, dear Alice, to procure for me so kind a welcome from you?"

" Mrs Beaufort sent for me this morning, and told me that you were coming to reside at Methwold, to be her companion and secretary. She bade me make you welcome, and show you any civility in my power. When I ventured to ask a little more about you, Mrs Beaufort turned aside, and dismissed me with her look of most lofty displeasure. I have lived long enough at Methwold, however, to detect that there exists a

hidden motive for your presence here," responded Miss Berners with heightened colour.

Margaret mused a few minutes.

"How long have you resided at the Abbey, Alice?" at length asked she.

"Nearly a year. My mother was niece to the late Lady Blanche Beaufort. I was born and have lived all my life in Canada, until about two years ago; when, on my dear father's death, I returned to England, intending to reside with a widowed aunt in Scotland. Mrs Beaufort, however, soon after she learned my arrival in England, invited me to Methwold; with the express understanding that, if I accepted her invitation at all, it should be for the space of two years, during which period she undertook to treat me as her daughter. She has been very kind to me, and I am generally considered a great and privileged favourite here. I love Mrs Beaufort, and at the same time fear her, Margaret—fear her with a terror the stoutest hearted might feel at rambling in the dark amidst frightful precipices, though assured no terrible catastrophe will befall them!"

"I have always heard Mrs Beaufort described as a stern, proud woman. But tell me, Alice, in what respect does she differ from other people, to inspire

the dread of which you speak?" asked Margaret anxiously, rising and approaching Alice.

"You will speedily realize this awe, Margaret; but it is indescribable! There is some mystery attached to these Beauforts. There is a secret agency always at work here,—a fatality attached to the fortunes of all who have lately dwelt at the Abbey! Mrs Beaufort herself has succumbed to this mysterious influence. Its shadow threatens my path; and your turn, if you remain amongst us, will not long tarry, Margaret!" and Alice raised her large brilliant eyes, and drew nearer to her companion, whilst a slight shudder shook her frame.

"Yet after all, Alice, Mrs Beaufort's reserve may be but the gloom engendered by a haughty, discontented disposition, unhappy in its isolation, yet disdaining to conciliate. You have made me positively dread my promised interview with her to-morrow morning!" replied Margaret smiling; for she did not choose to betray the impression Miss Berners' emphatic words had made.

For a few minutes Alice remained silent. Margaret anxiously watched the expression of her beautiful face.

"Did you ever hear that the Beauforts, for many

generations, have always received timely intimation of any impending calamity by a supernatural warning?" said she at length, almost in a whisper.

"No, never. Well, Alice?"

"Well, Margaret, it is recorded that when a death is about to happen in the family, or a serious evil impends, upon six separate occasions—sometimes successively, sometimes at long intervals—piercing shrieks are heard at night resounding all over the house, proceeding no one knows whence. There is also a well-authenticated tradition, that nothing of great moment has occurred to any of the Beauforts without the previous apparition of an ancestress of the family, who perished on the scaffold in the reign of Charles II. for the murder of her husband. The Lady Mabel's picture hangs in the gallery. Her countenance is fair and heavenly, bearing as little the impress of the dark passions for which she suffered, as your face does, Margaret. I have not heard that the phantom has as yet been seen by any one; but, Margaret, twice have we lately been horrified by the sound of the Lady Mabel's piercing shrieks!" exclaimed Alice shudderingly, glancing round the room.

"This is dreadful, indeed, Alice, if it really be so,

But are you sure that you are not allowing an excitable imagination to get the better of your reason? What effect has the omen on Mrs Beaufort?" asked Margaret, following in spite of herself Alice's fearful glance round the room.

"When we are better acquainted, Margaret, you will acknowledge that my spirit is not one readily daunted by imaginary terrors. I am no coward, and what I will I seldom fail to accomplish!" exclaimed Alice; and her dark eyes flashed proudly. "Mrs Beaufort's deportment is that perfection of self-command—that rigid control of every outward emotion—which falters not an iota in its subserviency to a mind despotic and inflexible as ever actuated woman!" continued she, after the pause of an instant. "The omen, Margaret, strikes with double awe, double reality, when daily events also seem to portend the occurrence of some strange thing. Mrs Beaufort secludes herself much in her own apartments, which are remote, situated in this old part of the mansion, and rigidly closed to every one. Then there is cold cautious-eyed Cartaret, with her obsequious smile and cringing words, and Mark Braddyll ——".

"Who is Mark Braddyll, Alice?" inquired Margaret, as Miss Berners suddenly paused, her attention

for the moment being apparently absorbed in tracing the outline of a star on the hearthrug with her fairy little foot.

"Oh, Mr Braddyll is a friend of Mrs Beaufort's—a gentleman, I believe, of Italian origin; about whose birth, parentage, and education, there is also some slight mystery. Do not ask me anything more about Mark Braddyll; you must see him and judge for yourself, Margaret," responded Alice, hastily.

"You appear to abound in mysteries at Methwold Abbey, Alice," replied Margaret with a smile. "There is still another personage living in this neighbourhood, who has already excited my wonder as much as any of the strange things you have just been telling me of. Who is Mr Carnegie?"

"An eccentric old nabob, who lives at a splendid place about four miles distant, rich enough to paper his rooms with bank notes if so he willed. Mr Carnegie, in short, is a reputed *millionaire*; too influential to slight, yet who, under the shelter of his golden shield, presumes to say rude disagreeable things of and to everybody, and consequently, is the object of Mrs Beaufort's especial aversion. But what do you know about Mr Carnegie, Margaret?"

"I travelled with him from Woodthorpe, and at

first felt not a little alarm at the brusque oddity of his language and manner." Margaret paused; then she suddenly resumed in a deliberate tone—"Yes, Mr Carnegie's deportment was so very strange, that I was quite relieved when at one of the stations I saw him exchange bows with Mr Somerton."

In a moment Alice's eyes were fixed upon her with intense earnestness. Margaret long remembered the passionate brilliancy of that inquiring glance. She thought of Mr Carnegie's admonition.

"You know Leonard Somerton, then?" said Alice, at length.

"Mr Somerton's character is well known to me, though I cannot say that we are personally acquainted. It is reported at Woodthorpe that he is engaged to you. Is this true, Alice?" asked Margaret fearlessly, impelled by an irresistible impulse; though the words were no sooner uttered than she would have given much to recall them.

Alice bit her lip.

"We are not engaged. Rumour has been as usual premature. Yet, Margaret, I have but *to will* to be mistress of Woodthorpe Park," replied she at length, confidently; then she added, after a moment's pause, "Sir James, Lady Mary, and Mr

Somerton come here to-morrow to spend a few days. Sir James once offered to Mrs Beaufort; and though she refused to become his wife, there still subsists most friendly feeling between them. Sir James Somerton, unworthy as I am, is extremely anxious to have me for a daughter; so perhaps one day the sun may shine on the propitious termination of Leonard Somerton's suit. He would make me, you know, Margaret, rich and happy — so what more can I desire?" and Alice swept back the clustering ringlets from her brow, and again bent her gaze on her companion.

Margaret made no reply; and the two stood in silent reverie, interrupted at length by a sudden dull clash from below, succeeded by a prolonged reverberation.

"Oh, it is only the gong announcing to the household that Mrs Beaufort has descended to the drawing-room to receive her guests," exclaimed Alice satirically, responding to Margaret's puzzled looks. "I must now bid you farewell, as she always expects me to be at my post in the drawing-room, as lady-in-waiting about her august person—an office that in future I design to make over to you, Margaret!" and taking up a candle, Alice approached a glass, and

with the prettiest grace imaginable began to arrange the snowy folds of her gown, discomposed by the carelessness of her attitude during this conversation with Margaret.

"Mrs Beaufort will think that our discourse has been very exciting, Margaret," continued she, pointing to the crimson flush on her cheek: "I hope her curiosity will not be piqued into inquiring its subject! Good-bye. I shall come and fetch you to breakfast in my apartment to-morrow morning. Remember you will have the picture-gallery to yourself this evening, if you feel inclined to stroll thither!" and so saying, Miss Berners disappeared.

Margaret sat for a minute or two, thinking on all Alice had said; but her meditations thereupon were evidently not of a cheering description, for gradually her soft cheek increased in brilliancy, and there was a changeful tremulousness in her eye, which told of strong inward emotion. She thought now with fond, loving regret of her home: for never are blessings so thoroughly prized, as when misfortune or folly bereaves of all but memory of the past. Oppressed by the loneliness of her position, Margaret at length fairly yielded to the feeling of extreme sadness and foreboding, which depressed her spirits; and tears

flowed down her cheeks with a vehemence and bitterness she had never before experienced.

She was presently roused from so fruitless an indulgence of sorrow by a dull sound, as of something heavy falling to the ground in the adjoining room; for the previous stillness in the apartment, broken only by her own deep sobs, rendered Margaret keenly susceptible of the slightest movement around. In an instant then her conversation with Alice Berners flashed upon her mind, and timid and unnerved she glanced fearfully about. Resolved, however, to resist such groundless fears, Margaret rose from her seat, and dashing the tears from her eyes, took up a candle, and resolutely approached the tapestry curtain, which Alice had but half drawn across the doorway of the inner room. Margaret threw an anxious hasty glance round as she entered.

The apartment was small, and octagon shaped; but there was nothing within it that visibly accounted for the noise which had alarmed her. Content to postpone any further examination of the room until the following morning, Margaret re-entered the bed-chamber, and after carefully closing the tapestry screen, approached the fire. She then took up a book and tried to read; for her spirits were yet too discom-

posed to permit her to retire to rest. The book, however, failing to dissipate her restlessness, was speedily relinquished; for her thoughts dwelt tenaciously on the mysterious occurrences Alice had related, with an earnest emphasis of voice and language that at any rate vouched for the sincerity of her own belief in their truth.

Margaret was not generally prone to indulge in superstitious fancies; yet, excited by the solitude and stillness around, and the sombre aspect of the room, her nerves acquired a painful degree of acuteness: so much so that every crack of the wainscot, or even the falling of a cinder from the grate, made her heart palpitate.

Provoked and annoyed at her own cowardice, Margaret at length took up the candle, resolved before she retired to rest to divert her thoughts by a stroll through the picture gallery. She easily found her way thither; but the vastness and echo of the corridors through which she passed, accustomed as she had been to her cottage home at Woodthorpe, served little to dispel her fears. Her nervous dread thus paramount, Margaret hesitated, uncertain whether to proceed, or to make the best of her way back again to her room, when the crimson baize

gallery doors closed behind her, and her eye wandered over the distant expanse of gloom, deepened by contrast with the glare of light spread immediately round her by the candle in her hand.

Full length family portraits hung on the gallery walls. Between each picture stood a marble statue, or an ebony cabinet laden with rare and costly bronzes, terra cotta vases, and specimens of curiously inlaid work. The floor of the gallery was of dark polished oak; and a crimson carpet, over which the foot fell with noiseless tread, traversed its length. Determined to conquer her fears, Margaret steadily advanced. Mr Desmond possessed a miniature of his mother, copied from an original portrait in the Methwold gallery; this picture therefore Margaret resolved to seek before returning to her own apartment.

As she slowly moved onwards, every now and then pausing to throw the light of the candle on some picture which appeared to resemble the one she sought, Margaret was struck by the singular loveliness of the portrait of a lady, attired in a rich court costume of the time of Charles II. The form and attitude of the lady breathed soft voluptuous refinement; her beautiful hair, bound together and wreathed into thick plaits, encircled

her small graceful head with a coronet of glossy auburn tresses. A bunch of blood-red carnations mingled on one side with a cluster of ringlets, touching a neck stately, and white as snow. Her eyes were bent to the ground, fixed on a couple of tiny spaniels gambolling at her feet. Her dress was of white satin; her rich fall of *guipure* lace was fastened at the bosom by a bouquet of carnations, similar to the group in her hair; gems also sparkled on her white arms and fingers, imparting brilliancy and finish to her costume.

Eagerly Margaret looked to discover the name of her graceful ancestress, and the date of the portrait. The label, however, at its foot was a blank; so resolving to indemnify herself on the morrow for her present disappointment, by bringing Alice to the spot, to explain the reason of this strange omission, Margaret, with another lingering glance at the fair lady, passed on. Soon she had nearly traversed the gallery, without discovering the picture she was searching for; therefore, concluding that in the vehemence of her wrath Mrs Beaufort had banished the portrait of her erring kinswoman from the gallery, Margaret prepared to retrace her steps.

At the end of the gallery another baize door corre-

sponded to the one through which she had just entered.

A leaf of the folding door was thrown back, and half hidden behind it, Margaret, as she turned to leave the gallery, discovered a picture previously overlooked. In one of its corners, in small gold letters, close to the frame, were inscribed the words, "Edith Beaufort, 179–." Feelings of delight and emotion arose in Margaret's mind as she gazed on the delicate features of the portrait, so refined in their expression, and thought of the passionate devotion with which her father cherished his mother's memory: how he remembered and treasured every accent of her faltering voice, when on her deathbed she exhorted him to shun those faults which had imbittered her own life; and to quell by early habits of discipline and self-denial that unrestrained impetuosity of disposition, the germs of which the watchful mother's eye already detected in her son's character.

Great was the contrast between Edith Desmond's thin colourless face and fragile figure, simply clad in white, without other relief or ornament than that afforded to the dress by a narrow band of clear blue velvet encircling her throat, and the

dazzling combination of perfect form and colouring which had charmed Margaret's eye in the portrait of the unknown lady.

She still stood gazing earnestly on the picture, when a light current of air caused the candle to waver. Margaret raised her hand to screen the light, and then turned away, with the intention of retiring to her own room. Suddenly her steps were arrested; the blood rushed to her cheeks and brow, then receded again, leaving her pale and breathless. Within a few yards of her, in front of the picture of the beautiful unknown, stood a lady. Her large dark eyes glittered with unnatural brilliancy as they were intently bent upon Margaret, and a profusion of soft dishevelled curls surrounded her face. The attitude of the lady was firm and unwavering: not a fold of her long white drapery stirred, nor the slightest perceptible respiration agitated the light tresses flowing from under her veil.

Overpowered with terror, Margaret's senses seemed paralyzed. Alice's words recurred with vivid distinctness to her mind: the apparition boded evil. It was that of the Lady Mabel, who had perished for her crime on the scaffold. A cold shiver shook

Margaret's frame, as she marked its extraordinary likeness to the portrait of the beautiful lady beside which the shadowy form stood. After a few brief seconds, the phantom glided swiftly down the gallery: it paused again at the crimson door, bent another glance upon her, and then vanished.

Margaret drew a deep breath, then hastily continued her way. Her own room, from the gloom of which she had previously fled, she now earnestly desired to regain as a safe haven; and with rapid, nervous step she proceeded onwards. All was dark and tranquil around, and with beating heart she soon found herself traversing the tapestried gallery upon which her door opened.

Joyfully she quickened her step; when, to her dismay, again the apparition stood at the top of the flight of stairs at the end of the corridor. The lady's brilliant eyes were riveted upon her, as if that full, mournful gaze had never been withdrawn. Presently she raised her transparent-looking hand and beckoned. Terrified beyond measure, Margaret, without hazarding another glance at the lady, regained her own apartment, and hastily entering, closed the door.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR many minutes Margaret sat with her face buried in her hands, pale and trembling; in momentary expectation, despite her better judgment, of seeing the vision of the lady flit again before her. At length she took courage, and glanced slowly and wistfully round the large room. The candle, during her abstraction, had guttered down nearly to the socket; the cheerful blazing fire also had exhausted itself, and the mass of glowing embers in the grate diffused a flickering ruddy light around.

Margaret snuffed the candle, hastily stirred the fire, and then sank back again into her former attitude; feeling that degree of languor and excitement which often bereaves of energy to seek the perfect repose wearied nature so ardently desires. With her eyes half-closed, though every now and then starting ner-

vously and gazing fearfully around, Margaret sat until she was aroused by several low knocks at her room-door. Too terrified at first to reply, she listened with beating heart; until, to her unspeakable relief, Margaret recognised Cartaret's voice: she then arose and admitted her.

Cartaret gazed somewhat curiously, perhaps significantly, on Margaret's pallid face as she entered; and her eyes wandered round the room. Satisfied apparently with her survey, she proceeded to replenish the fire, and then offered to assist Miss Desmond to undress. Margaret, however, declining her services, Cartaret took her leave; hoping, in her usual patronising manner, that Miss Desmond would pass a comfortable night, and condescendingly promising to call her at seven on the following morning.

It was then nearly one o'clock; therefore, as soon as her door was closed and securely locked, Margaret reluctantly prepared to seek her bed. Cartaret's visit had done her good, for it broke the spell of acute watchfulness which before possessed her; and, worn out with fatigue, soon after she laid her head upon her pillow, Margaret slept.

When she awoke the following morning, though it was with a nervous start, soon even she acknow-

ledged that there was now no further cause for dread, as the large bay-window opposite to the bed was dazzling with light, and sunbeams, clear and sparkling, penetrated into the curiously shaped niches and recesses of the room, which on the previous night looked so dismal and mysterious. In short, as she looked round, Margaret felt positively ashamed of her past fears; yet even then an involuntary shudder crept over her, whenever her thoughts reverted to the apparition of the picture gallery.

After some little deliberation, Margaret resolved not to impart to Alice what she had there witnessed. That the daily events of the Abbey, and the lives and characters of its inmates, were not influenced by those ordinary causes which usually produce a similarity of action and occupation amongst certain classes of people moving in the same rank of life, her own short experience of Methwold undeniably demonstrated; even had she not exchanged a syllable either with Alice Berners or Mr Carnegie. Determined, nevertheless, to form no hasty judgment, Margaret wisely refrained at present from attempting to lay down any particular rules for her conduct whilst under Mrs Beaufort's protection; and as she swiftly proceeded with her toilette,

many were her surmises and speculations on the result of her forthcoming interview with that much dreaded personage.

Margaret had just finished dressing, and stood leaning in the embrasure of the window, awaiting her summons to the breakfast-table, when Miss Berners entered the room.

"Well, Margaret, punctual I protest, despite your fatigue of yesterday! I foresee that you will become a prime favourite with Mrs Beaufort; who is as strict a martinet as was Frederick of Prussia himself. But that I thought it might be unseemly to disturb your slumbers this morning, we—that is to say, my friend Lilian Grant and myself—should have invited you to join us in a snowy ramble round the shrubberies!" exclaimed Alice merrily, approaching and gazing with somewhat critical eye on Margaret's face, as the sunlight fell and mingled its rays with the golden hues of her hair.

"Thank you; I am only this instant ready. Had you a pleasant party yesterday evening, Alice?" asked Margaret, blushing slightly at Alice's prolonged and earnest scrutiny.

"Oh yes! And you, Margaret, did you betake

yourself to bed after I left, or to a ramble through the picture gallery?"

"I went to look at the pictures," replied Margaret.

"Well, you have now seen what the Beauforts are like, Margaret. I can assure you, that the present mistress of Methwold yields not in stately haughtiness to the very grimmest of her ancestors! Come, let us go now to breakfast," said Miss Berners laughingly, linking her arm through Margaret's, and leading her from the room.

"There was one picture, Alice—the portrait of a lady—which attracted me greatly: her hair was looped with carnations. Can you tell me who she is?" asked Margaret, in a voice as unconcerned as she could command.

"That was the picture I was talking to you about last night, Margaret—the portrait of the lady Mabel," whispered Alice. "There is an extraordinary fascination in that picture, and strange tales are told of its effect upon strangers. But don't let us talk more of these horrors, Margaret: they make me long to leave all this splendour, and take refuge in my aunt's poor little Scotch cottage again. I am going now to introduce you to Miss Grant, a great friend of mine.

I have prepared her to like you, Margaret, therefore I trust I shall not ask your friendship for Lilian in vain!" said Alice, pausing a moment before the door of a room they had just reached; then, without awaiting Margaret's reply, she entered.

It was a pretty, cheerful apartment, situated in the best part of the mansion, and commanding a fine view over the lake and the ruins of the nunnery. Tables stood about, covered with all manner of pretty things in porcelain and bijouterie; evincing a propensity in the fair owner of the apartment to indulge to excess in a passion for costly and useless trifles. A bright fire burned in the grate, close to which was the breakfast table, with its clear milk-white china looking altogether fresh and tempting enough to provoke the most austere devotee to break his fast in Lent. Near the table stood Miss Grant. Alice introduced her friend in her usual graceful manner, and then busied herself in making the tea.

There was that in Lilian Grant's face which Margaret (who piqued herself on her skill as a physiognomist) could not satisfactorily decipher. Her forehead was low; and thick braids of jet black hair all but touched her eyebrows, which were strongly marked, and formed nearly a continuous arch

across the nose. Shadowed by this lowering brow were eyes of a deep grey hue, large, dreamy, and cautious in their expression. Every now and then, Margaret observed that they wandered round the room with a peculiar stealthy, inquisitive glance, and then drooped again; hidden for a time beneath the thick curling lashes which almost swept Lilian's pale cheek. She was of low stature; her figure had neither lightness nor grace, yet her fair complexion and youthful *embonpoint* gave a softness to her whole appearance. Miss Grant's attire was scrupulously neat and well chosen; for nothing could contrast better with her complexion and dark hair than the rich crimson hue of her plainly made merino dress, relieved only by a small white collar and cuffs.

"Come, Margaret, take your place at the table, or you will be summoned away to Mrs Beaufort before we have breakfasted," exclaimed Alice, glancing at a timepiece, and handing a cup of tea to each of the young ladies, who promptly obeyed her summons.

"Does Mrs Beaufort always breakfast in her own room, Alice?" asked Margaret.

"Generally so,—excepting of course when she has company staying in the house: now, to-morrow morning, Margaret, she will probably do the honours

of the breakfast table to Sir James and Lady Mary Somerton. Aunt Marian, who is now staying here, is in delicate health, and therefore prefers to spend the morning alone in her own room. As for Mr Braddyll, he breakfasts where he can; though I sometimes suspect, as he is never to be seen anywhere about, that he also courts repose until luncheon time."

"I saw Mr Braddyll walking early this morning along the path bordering the lake: he appeared to be going towards the village," said Miss Grant, in a low, even voice.

"Your word is always ready to rescue Mark Braddyll from any imputation, I know, Lilian," rejoined Alice, laughingly.

Miss Grant blushed deeply; then hastily taking up a flower from a plate near her, assiduously examined its delicate petals.

"Mr Braddyll's frequent visits to Denbridge are to me not the least mysterious part of his conduct, Lilian," resumed Alice, after a momentary pause. "You tell me that he seldom goes to your uncle's house, and yet he rides to Denbridge most days. Do you think that some fair damsel, enamoured with

his transcendent fascinations, is amusing herself with acting a few scenes from the play of 'The Belle's Stratagem?'"

"I have never read the play you allude to, Alice, and therefore cannot tell how far it is applicable to Mr Braddyll," replied Miss Grant, carelessly. Margaret thought there was a touch of petulance also in her tone. In a moment or two a quiet smile stole over Lilian's features, and she continued,—"You know, Alice, the proverb says, 'they who live in glass houses should never be the first to fling stones.' It is therefore very rash to provoke retaliation, when you know that Mr Somerton and Captain Stuart's impending visit will probably place you completely at our mercy."

It was now Alice's turn to blush; she started violently also.

"I never heard that Captain Stuart was expected here, Lilian: you must certainly be mistaken."

"I met Captain Stuart in Denbridge yesterday, Alice, and he told me that Mrs Beaufort had invited him to spend several days at the Abbey," replied Miss Grant, decisively.

Alice's cheek grew slightly pale, though gradually

the vivid colour stole back again; and her bright eyes flashed: but whether with anger, or a contrary emotion, Margaret was unable to decide.

"You reside, I believe, in the neighbourhood of Woodthorpe Park, Miss Desmond," said Lilian Grant, addressing herself for the first time to Margaret: "Do you know Mr Somerton?"

"Only by reputation, and occasionally seeing him at church," replied Margaret guardedly; for she was conscious of a very disagreeable feeling of shyness and restraint whenever Leonard Somerton's name was mentioned to her in Alice's presence: she blushed slightly, however, for Miss Grant's dark grey eyes were fixed full upon her.

"Woodthorpe Park is, I understand, but a small portion of Mr Somerton's eventual inheritance. How do you like the idea, Alice, of being one day mistress of such boundless wealth? How happy you ought to be! your every wish and passing whim gratified."

"Yes, every whim, as you say, Lilian, gratified; except if I should unfortunately take it into my head to desire to be passionately loved by the donor of all this wealth," rejoined Alice, with a bitterness

of tone which made Margaret's heart thrill: she eagerly glanced towards Miss Berners.

Alice was sitting with her arm resting on the table, her dark ringlets swept back over her shoulder, and her hand supporting her cheek; her sleeve had fallen back, and displayed her arm nearly to the elbow. For the first time then, Margaret perceived that a deep scar, the result apparently of some terrible burn or scald, disfigured the back of Alice's right hand, and extended half way down her arm. As if to make the blemish still more conspicuous, Miss Berners wore on the finger most deformed by the accident, a ring of fine blue enamel, studded with diamonds. On the blue ground was a scroll pattern of smaller jewels, forming a motto, as Margaret thought; though from the distance at which she sat she could not clearly distinguish. The ring however was a very remarkable one, and could not fail to attract both attention and curiosity.

Alice blushed deeply, and hastily withdrew her hand when she perceived that Margaret's eyes were fixed on the ring; then she rose from the breakfast table, and retreated to the window. In a few minutes Miss Grant joined her friend; but Alice, ap-

parently absorbed in reverie, took not the slightest notice of her approach. Wondering what could so greatly discompose Alice, Margaret, having now finished her breakfast, took up a book and began to read. She had scarcely commenced, when Cartaret entered with a message from Mrs Beaufort, desiring to speak with Miss Desmond immediately. Alice turned and looked at Margaret as Cartaret spoke. The cloud had vanished from her brow, and the smile again beamed brightly as ever round her mouth, imparting to her lovely face a soft voluptuous beauty of expression. As for Margaret, feeling how greatly the success of her experiment depended on the effect she might produce on Mrs Beaufort during this interview, her cheek involuntarily crimsoned with agitation.

"Do not excite yourself, dearest Margaret. Be calm, and above all take care Mrs Beaufort does not perceive that you are afraid of her. By summoning you to her private apartment she has already distinguished you: I have never been admitted to this privilege," whispered Alice, kindly taking Margaret's hand. "Mrs Beaufort is prepared to receive you most kindly, I am certain;

judging from the few words she said to me about you last night."

"My mistress desires to see Miss Desmond without delay, as she has another important engagement this morning," interposed Cartaret, who stood impatiently at the door.

Margaret then pressed Alice's hand, and immediately left the room.

For some minutes Miss Berners stood silently by the fire. Lilian Grant did not interrupt her reverie, but she silently marked its progress. At length Alice rejoined her at the window, against which she still loitered.

"What is your opinion of Margaret Desmond, Lilian?" said she, with assumed nonchalance of manner.

"She cannot boast of a tithe of your beauty, Alice, yet there is something so fascinating about Margaret Desmond, that I honestly confess I should be grievously dismayed to find her my rival in any conquest I wished to achieve."

"I cannot divine Mrs Beaufort's motives for bringing her to Methwold, and so specially enjoining me to show her every attention in my power. I would give much to hear Margaret's history; but

she told me that she had been forbidden to revert to it during her residence here," continued Alice, musingly.

Miss Grant did not immediately reply; her eyes were riveted on the floor. At last she said,

It is rather a strange fancy of Mrs Beaufort's to engage a companion whilst you remain with her, Alice; especially when Mr Braddyll undertakes the management of her affairs. Do you think that Miss Desmond is any distant connexion of hers? She certainly bears a strong family likeness to the Beauforts, and occasionally there is that in her voice and manner which reminds me of Mrs Agatha herself."

"I do not remember ever hearing Mrs Beaufort mention the name of Desmond, before she sent for me to announce Margaret's arrival," replied Alice, gravely.

"Would it not be better and more prudent, dear Alice, to try and ascertain this point?" resumed Miss Grant, rising, and throwing her arm round Alice's waist. "You know, dearest, that of late you have been regarded as the heiress of Methwold Abbey. Miss Desmond, in the discharge of her duties, will have much opportunity for intimate converse with Mrs Beaufort: in short, dear Alice,

—pray forgive the indelicacy of the suggestion—there seems to be so much mystery about this Miss Desmond and her arrival, that, greatly as I admire her, I strongly advise you to be on your guard," and Lilian pressed her lips to Alice's forehead.

"Lilian! it is neither wisely done, nor right in you, to hazard such conjectures; even supposing they were grounded on the strongest evidence, as yours assuredly are not. I do not believe that Mrs Beaufort would be guilty of such deception, after the hopes she has given me of succeeding her here. A woman of her indomitable resolution, had she seen fit to change her intention, would have gloried in proclaiming it. I am her nearest relative—indeed, as far as I am aware, her only surviving one!" exclaimed Alice passionately.

"Alice, you know that Mrs Beaufort attaches one condition to declaring you her heiress, and that is, provided you marry Leonard Somerton. You remember we have often talked of this together," said Miss Grant in her low placid tones, while her eyes fixed themselves earnestly on her friend's face.

"I do not deny that we have, Lilian: but what has this to do with Margaret Desmond?"

"Nothing: I was not alluding to her then. *She* cannot, you know, have any interest in Mr Somerton."

"None whatever, I should imagine, Lilian! Leonard Somerton loves me, and will erelong ask me to become his wife!" rejoined Alice, while her cheek flushed, and she turned her large brilliant eyes anxiously on her companion's face.

Miss Grant, however, made no reply: for some time neither spoke again.

"And Captain Stuart—he also loves you, Alice!" at length whispered Lilian, who had attentively watched the changeful expression of her friend's face.

Miss Berners started as if an asp had stung her.

"Lilian! if you love me, never mention Cuthbert Stuart's name in my hearing again!" exclaimed she passionately. "Oh! I would give half the rich possession of Methwold, were it mine, to prevent his visit here!" Alice remained silent for a few minutes, and her head sank on her folded arms. "Lilian! I cannot bear poverty, obscurity, and hardship! My whole being shudders and recoils at that penury, which entails utter extinction of all that is bright and beautiful in life! Oh, Lilian, that I had been born to

honours and wealth; or that, denied their possession, I had never here tasted their delights!" and Alice hid her face in her hands, and tears gushed fast and swiftly down her cheeks.

"Why do you weep, dear Alice? You know how greatly Leonard Somerton admires you, and that soon he will place you in that position, independently of Mrs Beaufort, which your beauty and talents entitle you to expect!" said Lilian affectionately, taking Alice's hand and carrying it to her lips.

"Then why does he not offer to me, and terminate this suspense, Lilian? Why does Mr Somerton leave me so long a time a victim to the taunting surmises of Mr Carnegie and others? He well knows that our union would be hailed with cordial approbation, both by Mrs Beaufort and Sir James Somerton!" exclaimed Alice vehemently, sweeping her hand across her brow.

"Perhaps Mr Somerton imagines that he has not made progress enough in your regard, to embolden him to venture upon such a step at present. Mr Braddyll exchanged a few words with him yesterday in Denbridge, and thought that he was anxiously anticipating his visit to the abbey," replied Miss Grant.

Alice shook her beautiful head; a slight smile curled her lip.

"I have often of late observed you and Mark Braddyll in earnest conversation together, Lilian. Does he ever hint why Mrs Beaufort secludes herself so much? Oh Lilian, have you also ever spoken to him about those frightful cries? I know that he is in Mrs Beaufort's confidence."

"But I am not in Mr Braddyll's, dearest Alice," replied Lilian, demurely. "Besides, whenever we talk together, which we seldom do privately, he studiously avoids allusion to the Abbey and its inmates."

"Well, Lilian, there is something in Mark Braddyll's conduct and deportment towards Mrs Beaufort that I am quite unable to comprehend. At times he treats her with an insolent freedom of manner, that in anybody else she would resent by immediate expulsion from her presence. Remember also, Lilian, that whatever you say to Mr Braddyll is invariably repeated again to his patroness; therefore, unless you mean to get into a terrible scrape, and be summoned before Mrs Beaufort's tribunal, you will be cautious." Miss Berners then quickly added,—"Let us go and walk, Lilian: I cannot settle to any employment this morning. Oh, if I knew what would befall me

during the next two years, I think I could meet my destiny, be it good or bad, more submissively. I can realize now that feverish anxiety which sent crowds to seek relief in Mademoiselle Lenormand's mysterious predictions. Come, Lilian!"

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARET, meanwhile, followed Cartaret, who swiftly led the way towards her mistress's apartments.

Now that the crisis of her experiment was at hand, and Margaret knew to a certainty that a few minutes would usher her into Mrs Beaufort's presence, she was astonished to find herself feeling so calm and self-possessed. Anticipation of an evil invariably magnifies its terrors: besides, Mrs Beaufort's formal, unkind reception was little calculated to detract from Margaret's dread of the interview. Strong now, however, in conscious rectitude, her courage did not once falter: perhaps, also, some secret prompting admonished her to demean herself in Mrs Beaufort's presence as became Mr Desmond's daughter, so that no unworthy weakness on her part should

still further augment the triumph of their haughty relative.

As Margaret passed the picture-gallery, the folding doors, through which she had entered it the previous evening, were thrown wide open. She stopped; and involuntarily her eye sought the portrait of the Lady Mabel. The sun shone brightly upon it, and on all around; and the gallery, with its long vista of rich colouring and sunlight, looked so tempting a walk, that Margaret would have turned reluctantly away, had she not remembered the apparition which had there mysteriously glided before her.

A frown contracted Cartaret's brow, when, not hearing Margaret's light footstep, she turned her head, and perceived her standing still near the gallery door; she impatiently retraced her steps, murmuring something about her mistress's dislike and displeasure at not being promptly obeyed. Margaret immediately declared herself ready to proceed, and in a few minutes she found herself standing in a large ante-room, situated at no great distance from the tapestried doors, which opened on the gallery where she slept. Here Cartaret begged her to wait, while she apprized Mrs Beaufort of her presence.

Provoked, though amused, at these numerous de-

lays and formalities, which might have ushered her into the presence of a sovereign princess, Margaret sat down, and resigned herself to endure another dreary interval of suspense. In a very few minutes,however, Cartaret re-appeared; then requesting Miss Desmond to enter the adjoining apartment, she quitted the room.

With palpitating heart Margaret obeyed, and found herself in a bed-chamber of enormous dimensions—lofty, isolated, and sombre, as was the general aspect of the mansion. She cast a hasty glance round: Mrs Beaufort was not there. Beyond, folding-doors again opened into another room; and in a few minutes a jingle of keys, and a noise as of a chair suddenly pushed aside, made Margaret's heart beat. Mrs Beaufort, however, did not make her appearance, and soon the stillness became painfully intense.

The sunlight poured full into the room, and had nearly extinguished the fire, shining on all with a warm lazy glow, that heightened the sense of motionless repose around. Margaret stood in the centre of the room, scarcely daring to breathe or move, lest the sound should break the mysterious spell; and she started with a feeling of absolute terror, when the silence was interrupted by the sharp crackling of the log of wood on the fire, which suddenly shot up into

vivid flames. At length she noiselessly crept to the hearthrug, and seating herself in a chair drawn close to the fire, looked with infinite curiosity round the apartment, from which the inmates of the Abbey were so strictly excluded.

At its upper end, near the door through which Margaret entered, stood a stately bed, surmounted by an umbrella-shaped oaken canopy, wreathed with fruits and flowers exquisitely carved in relief, and borne up by figures of knights in armour, likewise of oak. Curtains of rich green velvet were looped in festoons around, drooping at the corners of the bed on a coverlet of crimson satin. On the wall opposite to the foot of the bed, hung a full length portrait of the Lady Blanche Beaufort, attired in a white satin dress, and peach-coloured mantle. The artist had contrived to infuse so much life and spirit into the figure, and the rippling, changeful shadows on her rich satin dress were so faithfully rendered, that the Lady Blanche seemed stepping from her frame into the apartment, with an appearance of greater ease and alacrity than she had ever displayed during her lifetime. To the right of the picture, a large window, forming with its deep recess almost a tiny apartment of itself, admitted light into the

room; but so intense, apparently, was Mrs Beaufort's longing for seclusion and privacy, that creeping plants were trained to cling round the mullions of the window, so that their leaves might form a delicate and verdant screen, without throwing too sombre a shade over the room.

Several Indian cabinets and old-fashioned coffers stood about—one of which attracted Margaret's especial attention. It was, as she thought, a cabinet; though unusually large and ponderous. Formidable rows of key holes, half hidden by a projecting cornice of fine steel-work, formed, as it were, a frame to the whole. Mirrors, in antique settings of Venice workmanship, were inserted in the sides and the lower part of the cabinet; and altogether its appearance was so ancient and singular, that Margaret wondered what marvels of intricacy the interior would disclose.

Her attention was still riveted upon it, when again a movement in the next room startled her. Margaret felt the colour recede from her cheek; for she heard a footstep traverse the apartment, accompanied by a loud rustling of silk. Instinctively she sprang from her chair, and then curtseyed profoundly: as Mrs Beaufort stood in the doorway of the inner room.

In a few minutes Mrs Beaufort slowly advanced,

riveting a keen searching gaze on Margaret; then all at once a change swept over her face: her brow relaxed, and her brilliant eyes momentarily sought the ground. Margaret stood near the chair from which she had risen; her breath coming quick and fast, and her cheek flushed. Even thus early she began to comprehend what her father meant, when he warned her of that chill, unapproachable reserve of manner, which in Mrs Beaufort effectually repressed sympathy; and she felt a species of fear and awe, at standing in the presence of one who possessed, in such unenviable perfection, the terrible power of so controlling every outward impulse, as to render even her wildest access of passion subservient to her will.

"Margaret Desmond, you are welcome to Methwold Abbey!" at length exclaimed Mrs Beaufort, extending her hand. There was a staid cold composure in the tone of her voice. "Do not be frightened. Hold up your head and look at me! Has your father then given you so terrible an impression of my character, Margaret, that you cannot encounter my gaze without changing colour?" asked Mrs Beaufort in the same tone, bending another piercing look upon her.

Margaret remained silent. She keenly felt the

slights heaped upon her parents, and, not to purchase Mrs Beaufort's favour, would she utter a syllable tending to diminish the latter's conviction, that Mr Desmond remembered her conduct, and appreciated her accordingly.

"I see you scorn to propitiate at the cost of integrity of conscience—and you do right! Yet, beware: for unbending impassability of character ruined your father! No, Margaret, he owes nothing to me! Your father, after being adopted and loved as a son by the late Sir John Beaufort, stung his benefactor with the grossest ingratitude. He met with the prompt resentment such treachery demanded: yet, unerringly indeed, must retribution have overtaken him, and poverty and obscurity humbled his once haughty spirit, when Francis Desmond consents to accept for his daughter the position I have offered!" exclaimed Mrs Beaufort, with scornful sarcasm.

"My father yielded to my own pressing entreaties, Mrs Beaufort: his consent to my coming here was reluctantly extorted. Believe me, I am not insensible to your kindness in aiding us; when now, but for your liberality, we must have been totally ruined: but my residence under your roof will terminate as unpropitiously as my poor father's did, if

I commence it by wilfully suffering you to misapprehend his motives!" replied Margaret, hastily, raising her eyes to Mrs Beaufort's face.

"What is there in my past history, or present circumstances, that could induce a young girl in the bloom of youth to desire my society; at a cost, likewise, requiring a humiliating sacrifice of *amour-propre* even to contemplate? Is it because I am rich, Margaret, and that for the sake of some probable eventual advantage, you willingly submit to a life of painful dependence? If such are your motives, it will be well merited retaliation for you to learn from my lips, that I have long cherished Miss Berners as my adopted daughter!" said Mrs Beaufort, in tones cold and unmoved, dropping Margaret's hand, which she had taken.

"Some day, Mrs Beaufort, you will appreciate me better. I will not even strive to vindicate myself from your humiliating insinuation. Having accepted your proposals, whatever you choose to impose upon me, I will faithfully perform, as long as I remain under your roof," said Margaret sorrowfully; while tears, which she struggled in vain to repress, gathered in her blue eyes. As she listened to Mrs Beaufort's icy tones, a chill feeling of despair crept

over her, and she almost relinquished the hope of ever winning to a gentler mood a personage so stern and unbending. Already the sense of her lowly dependence pressed with sickening loathing upon her; and bitterly could Margaret have wept, in solitude and silence, her disappointment and desolation of heart.

A look of incredulity passed over Mrs Beaufort's face, and a smile curled her lip, as she turned aside and leaned for some minutes, apparently in deep thought, against the mantelpiece. Margaret looked at her stately and beautiful figure, and mourned the secret disquietude which banished content and happiness from the home of one so richly endowed with worldly blessings.

The most faultless model of Grecian sculpture could scarcely surpass Mrs Beaufort's features in symmetry and delicacy of outline; but the brilliant colouring of her still lovely face had vanished, and the white cheek and pallid care-worn brow told of deep mental suffering. An expression of suppressed pain and restless watchfulness lurked in her dark lustrous eyes, once radiant in the proud consciousness of that matchless beauty which bowed adorers at her feet. Her magnificent hair, which, in earlier days, almost swept the ground in its rare

luxuriance, was now gathered under a small simple cap of white lace; and many a silver thread streaked the smooth bands resting on her temples. Her gown of rich black watered silk, displayed the perfection of her queenly figure. She wore also a collar and undersleeves of lace, and a thin gold chain encircled her neck.

At length Mrs Beaufort removed the hand which shaded her brow, and, beckoning to Margaret to follow, led the way into the adjoining room.

"Sit down, Miss Desmond; I wish to converse with you on your future duties, and arrange a plan for your daily guidance. In the first place, you thoroughly understand, I hope, the position that you occupy in this house, as my reader and companion: one whose services I may at any time command—whose time is always at my disposal?"

"It will be my duty to study your approbation in all things," murmured Margaret in a low voice, perceiving that Mrs Beaufort paused for an answer.

"I need a companion, Margaret; and, having other views for Alice Berners, I have chosen you. But, mark, I do not offer you a home at Methwold because your father claims kindred blood with the Beauforts. That affinity between us, for reasons that I do not

consider myself called upon to explain, I have already signified it to be my pleasure that you impart to none whilst you remain under my roof. Should I hereafter discover that either through vanity or indiscretion, you have disobeyed me in this respect, I shall immediately withdraw my assistance and patronage from you and your family. Do you understand me, Margaret?"

Margaret slowly raised her head. The arbitrary command, but, still more, the cold composure and nonchalance of Mrs Beaufort's manner and language while uttering it, made every pulse throb simultaneously. A slight almost imperceptible smile parted Mrs Beaufort's lips as she marked the feverish flush which covered Margaret's cheek. Again she repeated her question.

"I understand, madam, that you forbid me to avow my relationship to you. Believe me, your last words have effectually allayed any anxiety I might have felt to claim such a distinction. I shall scrupulously attend to your wishes on the subject," replied Margaret, with a prompt determination of tone she felt too mortified to disguise. The next moment, however, she repented her want of self-

command, and timidly raised her eyes to witness the effect of her speech on her formidable companion.

"I perceive, Miss Desmond, that you inherit your father's unfortunate impetuosity of temper: I make every allowance, however, for the mortification my command must inflict," rejoined Mrs Beaufort calmly. "As much of your time will necessarily be spent with me in my apartments, you will soon learn to understand me better; and also to repress these childish ebullitions of temper, which I regard with peculiar displeasure. I shall require from you, moreover, Margaret, implicit obedience, great assiduity, and inviolable secrecy on all that passes in your presence whilst with me. On these conditions I will undertake to promise that you shall not repent having left your home to reside here."

Mrs Beaufort paused, then raised to her lips a glass of water standing beside her: a whiter hue seemed spread over her features. Margaret sat with her head bowed low, so that her glossy ringlets nearly concealed her flushed cheek and tearful eyes: her whole being recoiled from the mental and bodily bondage evidently prepared for her.

"You have not yet informed me, madam, what my daily duties are to be," said she at length, in low hurried accents, suddenly looking up, and anxious to bring the audience to a conclusion.

Mrs Beaufort now sat with her elbow on the table, her hand supporting her cheek, and her eyes bent strangely, and gloomily upon Margaret. She started when addressed, and instantly averting her gaze, took up a pen, and rapidly added a few lines to a half-finished letter on the table before her.

"Can you play and sing, Miss Desmond?" demanded Mrs Beaufort, throwing aside her pen. Hastily rising, she opened a piano: her fingers wandered for a few minutes over the keys, then she signed to Margaret to seat herself at the instrument. "Sing! and let me hear what kind of a performer you are. Sing, if you can, one of the full gushing melodies of the south!" and Mrs Beaufort stood impatiently awaiting the performance of her behest.

More and more astonished, Margaret rose: she felt that her wisest and most politic course was implicit obedience in the present stage of affairs, when, without breach of conscience, she might tender it; she therefore sat down to the piano and began to sing, though her voice was so tremulous that she could

scarcely command it. Mrs Beaufort stood by, listening attentively; and even while she sang, Margaret could not help remarking the singular immobility and perfect repose of her attitude. All at once, a heavy lumbering sound, as of some substance falling to the ground in the room above that in which they were, so startled Margaret, as to cause a momentary interruption in her song. The colour rose immediately to Mrs Beaufort's cheek, and her eyes glanced restlessly round the room. She then pressed her hand heavily on Margaret's shoulder, murmured the word "Enough!" and returned to her seat.

Again there was a long and deep silence: Mrs Beaufort continued writing; at intervals laying down her pen, and falling into reveries lasting several minutes.

"You were asking me just now, Miss Desmond, what your routine of daily occupation is to be," at length observed Mrs Beaufort. "I shall expect your attendance here every day from ten o'clock until luncheon time. You will await my summons in the boudoir—the last room of this suite, which opens on the east gallery. After two o'clock, the remainder of the day will be at your own disposal; excepting

that I shall wish for your presence for a short time before I retire for the night. I have still another employment to confide to you," added Mrs Beaufort, rising; and taking a bunch of keys from her writing-table drawer, she motioned to Margaret to follow her, and then entered the bed-chamber again.

As somewhat of the trepidation Margaret first experienced had subsided, she followed her stately relative with mingled curiosity and interest. Mrs Beaufort walked up to the curious old cabinet, and, applying a key to one of its massy locks, threw back the doors; she then touched a spring concealed in the frame of one of the mirrors, which immediately flew back, disclosing a deep recess filled with piles of dusty discoloured papers: the accumulated letters and memoranda, as they appeared to Margaret to be, of the Beauforts for generations back.

"These papers, it will be one of your earliest tasks to arrange," resumed Mrs Beaufort, in kindlier tones than she had before vouchsafed. "They comprehend many important details connected with our family history. You will carefully conceal the secret of this door; as the same spring opens several of the drawers, which contain jewels of great value, besides

papers connected with the ultimate disposal of the Methwold estates: these drawers I strictly forbid you to open." Mrs Beaufort spoke slowly and emphatically, and again her dark piercing eyes were riveted with earnest scrutiny on her fair companion's face. "The greatness of the toil has hitherto deterred me from undertaking the arrangement of these letters myself; but I place confidence in your fidelity, Margaret, from my knowledge of your father's character. Francis Desmond, save with a single lamentable exception, never failed in the punctual performance of any one of his outward duties."

A gleam of pleasure lighted Margaret's eye.

"Then you have faith in my dear father's integrity, Mrs Beaufort! Time surely must now have softened the keenness of your resentment; and oh! consider, I entreat you, whether, consistently with his character, he could have acted in that one instance otherwise than he did!" exclaimed she eagerly.

"Mrs Beaufort bit her lip: a look of displeasure swept over her face; and haughtily withdrawing her hand, which Margaret had taken, she closed the cabinet door and re-entered her sitting-room.

"I can readily comprehend the feeling which

prompts Mr Desmond's daughter to excuse his conduct; but, hear me, Margaret! I am not prepared to argue the point, or to listen to his vindication from your lips: henceforwards this subject is a totally forbidden one between us," said she coldly, reseating herself at the table. Mrs Beaufort then took several bank-notes from the table drawer, and laid them before Margaret.

"Here is the first instalment of the annual stipend I promised your father; write immediately and enclose it, Margaret. Francis Desmond lends you to me in consideration of a certain modicum of pounds, shillings, and pence: the faithful performance on my part of this compact is the only relation subsisting for the future between us." Mrs Beaufort pointed to writing materials on the table, and then composedly took up a book; in another minute, however, she abruptly put it aside, and passing into the adjoining room, closed the door behind her.

With trembling hand, Margaret prepared to perform Mrs Beaufort's bidding. Bewildered by all she had seen and heard, she knew not what to write; aware how keenly every word would be weighed and pondered over by the loved ones at home. All

with whom she had as yet come in contact at Methwold were people totally distinct in character, manner, and passions from any she had ever associated with.

Alice Berners, with her beauty and seductive grace of manner, had been the first to greet her after her arrival, and the only one who manifested the slightest sympathy for her friendless position, or who had cheered her by the smallest word of encouragement; yet there was something in Alice's character and deportment, perfect as the latter was, which Margaret in her own mind could find no better simile for, than to liken it to the gorgeous colouring of a tropical sky, ere the formidable tornado arises to mar and sweep away every obstacle offering even temporary resistance to its fury. Alice had shown herself, nevertheless, generous and kind-hearted, and Margaret's heart warmed towards her.

She thought, too, of her strange meeting with Mr Carnegie, and the sarcasm of his manner when speaking of the inmates of Methwold Abbey. Mrs Beaufort's pale exquisite features then haunted her: the same expression of lofty pride and self-will, which Margaret remarked in the face of the Lady Mabel, marred the beauty of her features; and her

small well-cut lips closed with a tightness and regularity imparting greater austerity to her countenance.

After thus indulging for a few minutes in reverie, Margaret hurriedly snatched up her pen, thinking that if Mrs Beaufort returned before her command was obeyed, her displeasure at such want of diligence would probably be very strongly expressed—and nothing did poor Margaret dread so intensely as a cold word and a lowering brow. Some half-hour elapsed: she had folded and sealed her letter, but Mrs Beaufort did not return. All again was silent around her, except that the clock on the chimney-piece ticked on in even, dreary monotony, and an occasional gust of wind shook the window, and flapped against it the pendent branches and long scarlet leaves of the Virginian creeper trained across.

Margaret sighed as she thought of the durance in which she sat: she panted to be at liberty—to breathe the fresh air—to absent herself for a period, however brief, from the strange faces and stranger events of the Abbey: a longing desire for change and movement possessed her. If she might be permitted to ramble out alone, and, away from all interruption, analyze her new position, and school herself to submit to its exigencies, she felt would be relief unspeakable.

Another half-hour dragged on its weary course, and still Margaret sat at the table: she knew not what to do, or what was expected of her—whether to retire, or to remain at her post. She rose and looked round; then a new difficulty presented itself: she knew not how to make her exit from the room. She felt that she should render herself liable to the charge of impertinent intrusion, did she presume without express permission to explore the *terra incognita* of the adjacent rooms; and breaking in upon Mrs Beaufort's retirement in the bedchamber, by which she had entered the apartments, was an exploit too desperate to venture upon.

Despairingly Margaret sank back again in her chair. Wearied and spent by a long morning of excitement and inaction, she presently suffered her head to droop on her folded arms, and tears of mortification and wounded pride gushed plentifully from her eyes. In this attitude she remained for some twenty minutes, when three sharp ringing knocks at the door communicating with the remaining apartments of the suite, caused her to start and snatch up her pocket handkerchief, to dash the tell-tale tears from her eyes. After a brief pause, the door was unceremoniously opened, and to her surprise, a

gentleman entered. He paused at the door, astonished, or pretending to be so, at seeing her seated there; then advancing to the table, he gazed curiously on her flushed and tear-stained cheek.

Had Margaret been the veriest coquette in existence, she must have confessed, could she have then surveyed herself, that never had her looks appeared to greater advantage than at this moment. Her tears imparted to her blue eyes a soft, subdued expression, and her complexion looked still more dazzling than was its wont, in contrast with the heightened bloom of her cheek, over which her pale auburn ringlets strayed, disordered by her previous negligent attitude.

"I beg your pardon: I thought to have found Mrs Beaufort here. Do you know whether she will be long absent?" asked the stranger, profoundly bowing to Margaret, with an air plainly evincing his admiration; then drawing a chair, he seated himself opposite to her.

Margaret, who just then was in a mood to suspect and dislike every individual or thing connected with Methwold, could not, however, help being pleased with the frank, gentleman-like manner of the personage who now addressed her.

"Mrs Beaufort quitted this room an hour ago; I do not know whether she will return here," replied she, slightly blushing.

Margaret then resumed her pen again, embarrassed beyond measure, and wondering when her unpleasant position would terminate; as the gentleman, after acknowledging her last observation, quietly took a newspaper, apparently intending to await Mrs Beaufort's return. He now changed his seat for one rather behind her; nevertheless, a kind of undefined consciousness that his eyes were oftener riveted upon herself than on the columns of the newspaper in his hand, redoubled Margaret's confusion.

He was a tall, powerfully made man, broad chested, and erect in his carriage; his age averaged apparently between thirty and thirty-five years; his features were regular, but unrefined and unintellectual in their expression; his complexion was very florid, and served, when he smiled, to enhance the brilliancy of a set of white, even teeth; his eyes were black and gloomy-looking, though quick and restless in their motion. He wore large bushy whiskers; his hair was black and curling, and arranged with the greatest possible care, so as to harmonize with the style of his face and figure.

The next few minutes were to Margaret perhaps the longest she had ever spent in her life. At length the welcome sound of Mrs Beaufort's step greeted her ears; and after a short interval she made her appearance, with an open letter in her hand, looking, if possible, paler, and more worn than Margaret had yet seen her.

"You are returned earlier to-day than usual from Denbridge," said she coolly, as she swept majestically past her visiter to her chair. "Miss Desmond, it gives me pleasure to present to you an old and much valued friend of mine, Mr Braddyll," continued Mrs Beaufort, turning towards Margaret. "Mr Braddyll—Miss Desmond."

"I concluded that I had the honour of speaking to Miss Desmond," said Mr Braddyll, returning Margaret's slight inclination by an obeisance profound and deferential.

"Have you seen Alice Berners and Miss Grant this morning, Mr Braddyll?" asked Mrs Beaufort, suddenly looking up from the open letter she held before her.

"I have just met her and her friend in the park. Undaunted by the severity of the weather, Miss Berners is gone to the sheds to look at the deer."

Mr Braddyll paused, and then addressed Margaret,—"When the spring arrives, Miss Desmond, you will be enchanted with the magnificence of our woodland scenery: the oak glades of Methwold Abbey are renowned throughout England."

But the name of "Braddyll" had effectually repressed Margaret's admiration of the personage owning the deep sonorous voice with which she now heard herself addressed: she remembered Alice's equivocal mention of Mrs Beaufort's privileged favourite, and therefore coldly bowed in acknowledgment of his words.

"Can you give directions lucid enough to enable a messenger to overtake Alice Berners, Mr Braddyll? I want to dictate to her a reply to this letter," interposed Mrs Beaufort. "Stay; do you understand Italian, Miss Desmond?—if so, I may avail myself of your services."

Margaret hesitated: she could read and translate Italian perfectly well, but she scarcely felt competent to write the language; especially at Mrs Beaufort's dictation. Mr Braddyll perceived her reluctance, and good-naturedly came to her rescue.

"Tell me what you wish to say to your correspondent, Mrs Beaufort, and I will relieve Miss Des-

mond: she must be fatigued to-day, and scarcely feel able to enter upon her duties," and Mr Braddyll quietly drew a chair near to Margaret; then without further appeal to Mrs Beaufort, took up the letter perused it, and commenced a reply. "Mrs Beaufort has many Italian correspondents, Miss Desmond; and should you not feel quite equal to the task of replying to their letters, it will give me infinite pleasure to aid you in your study of the language," said Mr Braddyll presently, in tones the most courteous and insinuating.

Margaret looked distressed.

"Miss Desmond will feel extremely obliged to you, Mr Braddyll," authoritatively interposed Mrs Beaufort: "a perfect knowledge of the Italian language is a qualification indispensable in her present situation; and your mother having been an Italian by birth, she can have no better instructor. Now, Margaret, you may retire: as you will perhaps like to repose after your journey, I will excuse your presence at the dinner-table this evening. You may enter the drawing-room at eight o'clock, and when the party disperses you will accompany me to my room."

Margaret rose, hurriedly curtseyed, and gladly

quitted Mrs Beaufort's presence, assiduously attended to the boudoir door by Mr Braddyll.

When this gentleman returned to his place in the apartment where he left Mrs Beaufort, he roughly pushed the writing materials from before him to the other end of the table; then wheeling round his chair, he brought it exactly vis-à-vis to his companion.

Mrs Beaufort's magnificent eyes rested upon him with a scornful, defiant gaze; and a mocking smile played round her mouth.

"Well, what do you think of Margaret Desmond? Are you satisfied?" demanded she at length, in low, measured tones.

"Satisfied!—immeasurably! She is the most elegant, dainty little fairy imaginable,—ethereal enough to have been fed all her life on nectar and honeydew! Even the peerless Alice must yield the palm of grace!" exclaimed Mr Braddyll, enthusiastically.

Mrs Beaufort's proud lip curled.

"She is a Beaufort!" replied she, emphatically: then she added, "the papers, Mark!—where are the papers?"

"Pray, why did you interdict Miss Desmond from making her appearance at the dinner-table this

evening?" asked Mr Braddyll coolly, without heeding Mrs Beaufort's query.

"For reasons which I do not conceive myself bound to explain to Mr Braddyll," retorted Mrs Beaufort, contemptuously.

"You are courteous, madam"—began Mr Braddyll; but Mrs Beaufort haughtily interrupted him.

"This is trifling! Mark, give me those papers," exclaimed she, angrily.

"Confound the papers!—By-the-by, I met old Ralph Carnegie in Denbridge this morning. What the deuce, madam, could tempt you to invite the prosing old fool to dine here to-day?"

Mrs Beaufort's eyes flashed with fury enough to annihilate the insolent offender before her; who sat lounging in his chair, nothing daunted by the indignation his words provoked. Mrs Beaufort then arose; she made no reply, though the effort to restrain herself apparently cost her a severe inward struggle. She bit her lip until the blood sprang; then with another glance, which made even Mr Braddyll shrink, bold and undaunted as he was, she swept by him.

He spoke to her, but already Mrs Beaufort had disappeared; and the heavy oak door which divided the

sitting-room from her bed-chamber closed with a crash that made everything in the apartment shake.

Mr Braddyll sat in deep rumination for some twenty minutes longer, and then likewise made his exit from the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Margaret returned to her room, she found it looking very cheerful and pleasant. The apartment had been carefully arranged; and the tapestry curtains which divided the bedroom from her tiny study beyond, were looped back, so as to afford a complete *coup d'œil* of the extent of her territory. Blazing wood fires burned in both apartments, and the sun shone so brightly round, and upon her, and poured so ruddy a glow on the distant snow-clad hills of the park, that Margaret insensibly felt her spirits rise; and she set about the task of unpacking with more alacrity than she would have believed possible, had any one before predicted what was to pass in her interview with Mrs Beaufort.

Her study was a pretty, octagon room, hung with crimson silk, and almost surrounded by book-

shelves; which, to Margaret's joy, were not quite empty. A round table stood in the centre of the room, on which was placed a blue china inkstand; and about, lay a number of pretty, fanciful appendages of a lady's writing table. Close to the window, a crescent-shaped flower-stand was filled with double violets, hiding their deep purple blossoms amidst a forest of leaves, and diffusing delicious fragrance around.

Margaret again felt almost inclined to laugh aloud, when she thought of the beating heart, and shuddering apprehension, with which she had entered her snug little apartment the evening before; yet, despite the incredulity daylight brought, her eyes carefully sought the probable cause of the sudden noise that so startled her. After many vain conjectures, which nothing apparently justified, she turned away, and was soon busily engaged in arranging her wardrobe.

After a time her activity began to flag: she wandered back into the inner room; and, having first stopped at the flower-stand to cull a violet or two, approached the fire, and drawing an arm-chair close to the fender, she sat down to enjoy a "dolce far niente." For some time Margaret's eyes roved restlessly round, while she planned in her own mind

the place she should assign in the room to various trifling articles she had brought from home. Then she gratefully thought of Alice's kindness in taking such pains to adorn her room; for in many little arrangements she detected a refinement, and an appreciation of what would be most acceptable to the fancy, betokening that other than a servant's taste had been consulted. Alice's society and friendship Margaret, therefore, fondly dwelt upon; hoping therein to find compensation for the mortifications she foresaw would overwhelm her, from the harshness of Mrs Beaufort's temper, and her imperious love of rule.

From Alice, by a very natural connexion of ideas, her thoughts centered on the companion of their morning meal, Lilian Grant. Margaret felt almost ashamed of the hasty impetuosity with which she had secretly judged Alice's friend; yet there was something unaccountably repugnant to her in Miss Grant's demeanour: there was an implied caution she disliked excessively in the sidelong glance of her grey eyes, and in the unvarying tones of her voice; and, severely as she took herself to task, Margaret found it impossible to alter her opinion, for one more charitable. Of all the future annoy-

ances, then, her residence at Methwold presented, there was not one, in Margaret's eyes, so intolerable—excepting, perhaps, Mr Braddyll's officious proposal of improving her Italian—as the prospect of being brought into habits of daily familiarity with a girl of Lilian Grant's disposition.

These, and a thousand other similar reflections, passed swiftly through Margaret's mind; but soon she dismissed them, and with her face buried in the cushions of the chair, she sat and dreamed of that other event this most important day of her life had still in store—of her approaching interview with him whom Alice regarded as her own affianced husband.

In what capacity would Mrs Beaufort introduce her to Mr Somerton; or would she consider it necessary to use any ceremony at all with a poor, dependent cousin, and humble companion, and so leave it to chance, or perhaps to the friendly offices of Alice Berners, to make them known to each other? Would Mr Somerton recognise her, or permit her to acknowledge and thank him for the generous assistance afforded to her father in his hour of need?

The window of Margaret's sitting-room looked out upon the gravelled court in front of the mansion; and as the winterly twilight closed in, the sound of

carriage wheels without, and the pealing of the hall-door bell, announced the arrival of some of Mrs Beaufort's expected guests. Margaret approached the window; but it was too dark and foggy to allow her to distinguish aught, save the shadowy outline of a carriage standing beneath the porch.

With something between a sigh and a smile, she turned away, and rousing the fire into a blaze, busied herself in finishing the task, begun some two hours ago, of emptying her trunks. She had just completed this operation, and was standing listlessly before the fire, feeling very tired and hungry, and wondering what could have become of Alice, when Cartaret made her appearance, to summon her to dinner.

Margaret followed her to the apartment where she had breakfasted. On the table lay a note from Alice, excusing her seeming inattention, and explaining that both she and Lilian had got nearly wet through during their long ramble in the park; and that on her return home, about four o'clock, she had quickly changed her dress, and was hurrying to Margaret's room, when a message from Mrs Beaufort summoned her to the library, to receive Sir James and Lady Mary Somerton, who were just arrived. Alice added, that she had just been

informed by Mrs Beaufort, that Margaret would not be present at dinner; and concluded by good-naturedly advising her to be punctual in the drawing-room by eight o'clock, if she wished to avoid entering alone, before a party of strangers.

When Margaret returned to her own room—for her solitary meal, with Cartaret as duenna, was quickly despatched—she threw herself on a sofa, to snatch an hour's repose, before the process of her toilette commenced. At the proper hour, Alice's maid presented herself; sent by her mistress, with a kind message, to assist Margaret to dress. Overjoyed to be delivered from Cartaret's grudging service, Margaret gladly accepted; and by some twenty minutes to eight she stood before her glass ready attired.

A conscious blush mantled her cheek as she surveyed herself; for Margaret had chosen to make her début in the most becoming and costly dress she possessed — a blue silk, which had been one of her mother's wedding gifts, and had never since that event seen light; until Margaret's journey to Methwold was decided upon, when it was converted into a very acceptable addition to her wardrobe. Forgetful, therefore, of her past or future trials, and happy in the bright illusions of

imagination, Margaret stood, arranging the long, shining curls which clustered closely round her white neck, arrayed more brilliantly than she had ever been in her life before: a smile hovering on her lips, and a warm, changeful lustre beaming from her eyes. Well might Mr Desmond tremble at exposing his fair and innocent child to the fatal atmosphere of Methwold Abbey.

Preceded by Miss Berners' maid, to show her the way, Margaret descended to the saloon, precisely at the hour she was bidden to do so by Mrs Beaufort. Dazzled by the splendour of the room, blazing with light, Margaret paused after the door closed, and gazed admiringly round. Every way she turned she saw her own graceful figure reflected in huge mirrors; the air of the apartment, likewise, was buoyant with fragrant odours: in short, Margaret fancied herself in fairy land. The bewildering effect of a scene so novel, made her at first unobservant of the fact that, punctual as she was, Mrs Beaufort and her guests had preceded her.

The ladies stood grouped negligently at the upper end of the room, having apparently just quitted the dining-room. Mrs Beaufort was standing before the fire, talking with a pale, delicate-looking woman.

Miss Grant sat near the table, conversing with a lady, whose calm manner, benevolent countenance, and quiet, rich attire, attracted the eye, and bespoke a disposition infinitely loveable and inviting. In truth, Mrs Cecil's character had been purified by much tribulation: earthly vicissitudes had driven her to seek consolation and relief where none ask in vain; so that her gentle, persuasive manners, and excellent example, gave her considerable influence; for all, even including her volatile niece, Alice, were anxious to win Aunt Marion's sweet, approving smile.

As for Alice, dazzling as a queen, she stood, the centre of a bevy of gaily clad ladies; her beautiful face dimpled with smiles, and her clear, joyous laughter ringing merrily, as she addressed herself, with graceful vivacity, first to one and then to another personage of the group gathered round her. She was dressed in pale pink satin; a bouquet of white camellias fastened her berthe, and a solitary half-blown rosebud embedded itself amid her shining hair.

Margaret, meanwhile, remained disregarded by the gay throng; and a painful feeling of embarrassment, and perhaps one of bitter isolation also, caused her heart to throb tumultuously. At length

Alice's eyes glanced towards the door; she perceived Margaret's perplexity, made a hasty movement towards her, then looked hastily towards Mrs Beaufort, and sank down on a sofa near.

Too well Alice understood the command implied by that slight gesture and look, in reply to her own, to venture upon disobedience: Mrs Beaufort's subordinates were too thoroughly trained ever to mistake her intentions. Presently, however, Mrs Beaufort advanced, and beckoned Margaret towards her; and when she spoke, there was a graciousness in her tones, differing from the stern, dry stateliness of her morning's conversation. She took Margaret's hand, and led her up to the fair, delicate-looking lady with whom she was talking.

"Lady Mary, let me present to you Miss Desmond; a young lady for whom I have a great regard, and who is at present residing with me. Margaret, Lady Mary Somerton," said Mrs Beaufort.

A deep blush spread over Margaret's cheeks as she touched the hand which Lady Mary immediately and kindly extended. This pale-looking invalid was, then, the mother to whom Leonard Somerton was so devotedly attached.

At a sign from Mrs Beaufort, Alice now advanced, and drew Margaret aside.

"Aunt Marion has just been asking who you are, Margaret, and she desires to be introduced to you," whispered Alice; then she continued, "Now, Mrs Beaufort has taken the initiative, I suppose she will abandon you for the rest of the evening to my care. How pretty you look, Margaret!" and her eyes wandered thoughtfully over Margaret's dress and figure. "Mr Carnegie is more odious than ever to-night; he has been boring me to death with pertinacious queries about you, Margaret. I suppose he took a fancy to you yesterday in the railway carriage; so I am glad that you will find one friend amongst the gentlemen to converse with presently! See, Aunt Marion is looking towards us. Come!"

Margaret gave one timid glance at Mrs Beaufort; but, perceiving that she was conversing again with Lady Mary, followed Alice, who led her to her aunt. Mrs Cecil kindly made room for Margaret beside her; but as she was naturally reserved, and said little, and her young companion was too new to the scene round her, and pre-occupied with her thoughts, to prove very talkative, their conver-

sation soon subsided. Margaret inwardly congratulated herself on her fortunate position near Mrs Cecil; where, ensconced in the corner of the sofa, and half hidden by that lady's somewhat portly figure, she could observe all that was going on in the room, without being conspicuous herself.

As soon as the tea was handed round, Margaret remarked that Alice quitted the knot of young ladies with whom she had been for some time keeping up an animated dialogue, and took a chair close to Lady Mary Somerton, and began talking to her with the greatest *empressement.* Lilian Grant sat by herself at a table, turning over a book of engravings. Margaret observed that though she did not converse much, and held herself aloof from the party, she listened with eager attention to every word spoken; her eyes also often glanced quickly and furtively over the features and dress of different personages in the room, when assured that their attention was diverted elsewhere: though, whenever Miss Grant happened to be addressed, she sedulously fixed her eyes on the ground.

Wearied apparently with her long colloquy with Lady Mary Somerton, when Alice approached, Mrs

Beaufort, without troubling herself to play the agreeable to her other guests, threw herself on the couch opposite the one Margaret and Mrs Cecil occupied; which was slightly apart from the company. There was lassitude, and a melancholy expression in her dark eyes, Margaret thought, as she several times raised her handkerchief to her face, then restlessly glanced round the room, and next at the hour. In another minute, then, to Margaret's surprise, and it must be honestly added, chagrin, also, Mrs Beaufort signed to her to come and speak with her. She instantly obeyed.

"You look very well this evening, Margaret; but I consider that you are too much dressed for your position in my household," said Mrs Beaufort coldly. "Aspiring to soar above the station in life providence has placed you in, and assuming outward distinctions to which you have no claim, may be the source of much future misery to you. Remember your mother's history: had *she* heeded counsel, Francis Desmond's only child might have been other than she is."

"I am sorry my dress displeases you, madam. Your rebuke is perhaps just: I have no longer

right to wear attire such as this. I will not transgress again!" exclaimed Margaret, with a dash of bitterness in her tone that she could not repress.

"You will do well: a simple muslin dress is most becoming to your position." Mrs Beaufort paused: her white hand moved restlessly on her velvet dress. "Look! Margaret, do you think that portrait a good likeness? I mean the portrait hanging at the end of the room." It was a full length picture of Mr Desmond, taken a year or two before his marriage. "Few at the time that picture was taken could rival your father, Margaret, in manly beauty," continued Mrs Beaufort, quickly. "I suppose he is very much altered now, whilst verifying the old adage, 'Marry in haste, and repent at leisure!'" added she, bitterly.

Margaret struggled to command her feelings: to betray them to Mrs Beaufort's unfeeling comments she felt would be profanation. As she scarcely knew how to frame an answer without giving offence, she rejoiced when the drawing-room door opened, and Mr Carnegie entered.

His attire was still varied by a plentiful display of his favourite colour: his waistcoat was of scarlet and

black brocade; and, as if to indemnify himself for the little scope an evening dress afforded for its farther introduction, a huge scarlet camellia stuck in the button-hole of his coat. His light sandy-coloured hair waved in the same graceless confusion as had before excited Margaret's wonder; now hanging like a deep fringe over his brow, then pushed negligently back, for convenience, or the better display of his quaint features.

No one, however, presumed openly to find fault with, or censure Mr Carnegie's appearance. The master of the Holt, and the possessor of a fortune which he sometimes boastfully declared would buy up all the broad acres of the county magnates, might almost have worn a coal-scuttle on his head, with the delightful certainty of hearing his whim applauded, if not servilely imitated. All, therefore, but the haughty mistress of Methwold Abbey, bowed before the little gentleman, and his strange *penchant* for scarlet. Nothing delighted Mr Carnegie more than to apply the touchstone of his golden influence; and never was he heard to laugh with such gleesome and malicious mirth as when he found what people called "their deeply rooted principles and prejudices" vanish beneath its magical application.

Mr Carnegie then advanced into the centre of the room, and took a deliberate survey round.

"Oh! there you are, Miss,—Miss what's your name? I told you we should soon meet again. Come, I am very glad to see you looking so blooming. I was told that you were sick and sorry after your journey, and could not make your appearance at the dinner-table. Nothing I perceive but a little bit of feminine humbug!" exclaimed Mr Carnegie, loud enough to be heard by every person present; and crossing to where she stood, he shook Margaret heartily by the hand.

"You are acquainted with Mr Carnegie, I perceive, Miss Desmond?" said Mrs Beaufort inquiringly, in her haughtiest tones.

"We travelled together yesterday, madam," hurriedly replied Margaret; for the same fierce look which she had before remarked suddenly shot from beneath Mr Carnegie's pale eyelashes.

"Yes; Miss Desmond and myself were travelling companions yesterday, Mrs Beaufort. Perhaps it may remind you of the story of Beauty and the Beast; nevertheless, this young lady's conversation whiled away pleasantly what otherwise would have proved a very disagreeable journey. I always re-

mark that those people who are so confoundedly hoighty-toity and straight-laced have generally some good reason for their reserve," rejoined Mr Carnegie abruptly.

"Nobody could for a moment think of disproving a dictum laid down by Mr Carnegie with such admirable *naïveté*," responded Mrs Beaufort sarcastically, in her coldest manner.

"I read this pithy axiom the other day in the work of some juggling priest, madam"—'If you cannot disarm those who differ from you in opinion by fair words, or by force, do it by raillery'—little imagining to find this artful weapon wielded by Mrs Beaufort!" responded Mr Carnegie promptly, standing with his fingers thrust into his waistcoat pocket—a favourite attitude of his. Presently he exclaimed, after glancing several times from Margaret to Mrs Beaufort, "God bless my soul, madam, what an extraordinary likeness there is between you and this young lady! She has quite the Beaufort cut of features: one could almost swear that you were her near kinswoman. I say, Miss Desmond,—" Mr Carnegie paused, and turned abruptly towards the door, for he perceived Margaret's eyes were riveted in that direction: in truth she had not heard his last remark.

Mr Somerton had just entered the room, accompanied by another gentleman, a stranger to Margaret. There was that same quiet ease and refinement in Mr Somerton's deportment—a kindly dignity which never wounded, while it effectually repressed familiarity or presumption—that always fascinated Margaret. Then his rich modulated voice fell on her ear (for Mr Somerton was talking when he entered the room), which she thought must so pleasantly convey to the ear of those fortunate enough to converse with him, the workings of that noble intellect impressed on his broad thoughtful brow, and flashing in the glance of his dark eyes. Involuntarily Margaret turned towards his mother; and she felt that she both sympathized with and understood the feelings of deep tenderness and pride which flushed Lady Mary's pale cheek.

Mr Somerton gazed earnestly and with some surprise on Margaret, as he passed to his mother's chair. Mr Carnegie's eyes followed him with a keen inquiring expression; and he turned to Margaret: for Mrs Beaufort, on the entrance of the gentlemen, rose from her seat on the sofa, and now occupied her former place near the fire.

"I thought you told me yesterday that you knew

Mr Somerton? In my days, in such case, it used to be the fashion for young ladies and handsome young gentlemen to speak, and not to stare at each other like simpletons!" exclaimed Mr Carnegie, sitting down by Margaret.

"No; I told you, on the contrary, that Mr Somerton had never been introduced to me," replied Margaret laughing, and slightly blushing.

"Wait awhile, then; I'll obviate that difficulty. Well, Miss Desmond, you look fresh and fair this evening as a Venus Anadyomene, and not at all like Agatha Beaufort's head waiting-woman. How do you like Methwold?"

"Nay, Mr Carnegie, I have not had time to decide, either favourably or otherwise, of my position at present," answered Margaret.

"Humph! Madam Beaufort relaxes her discipline as yet, does she? Trust me, however, young lady, you will soon have had enough of it. What *could* your father have been about to let you come here, I wonder? Where does he reside?"

"At Woodthorpe. He is the kindest, best, and most loving father to me possible," replied Margaret warmly.

"Indeed! Well my dear, if he wants you back

again soon, he took a very effectual course in sending you hither. Look at that abominable little coquette, Alice Berners," added Mr Carnegie, satirically.

Margaret's eyes had been for some time fixed upon her. Alice was sitting by Mr Somerton; her fine eyes sparkling with animation, and her silvery voice ringing buoyant and clear as she conversed, with a pretty coy shyness of manner, every now and then suffering her long black lashes to droop on her cheek. Margaret, however, thought that there was too great a nonchalance in Mr Somerton's attitude; and she could by no means understand his eagerness, while he was smiled upon by so fascinating a creature as Alice, to make others partake in the privilege of her conversation: it scarcely realized her notions of lover-like devotion. Then he frequently addressed or appealed to Lady Mary, or even to Mr Braddyll, with whom the latter was conversing; when, according to Margaret's ideas, Alice's opinion alone ought to have sufficed him. Besides all this, Mr Somerton's dark eyes roved away so frequently from his beautiful companion, that, despite Margaret's willingness to believe what she was told, she was forced secretly to own that at any rate the conversation did not then

possess such thrilling interest for him as it apparently did to Alice.

"Who is that gentleman Mrs Beaufort is talking with now? I never saw a more interesting, sensible countenance than his," asked Margaret, suddenly turning to Mr Carnegie.

"That is Captain Stuart,—a man of superior intellect and principle. I respect him; and you will find that, excepting Somerton, he is better worth knowing than anybody you are likely to meet here: not, however, that you are liable to be overburdened with his company, as he is poor as a church-mouse—too honourable to be a parasite—and too independent to toady either Mrs Beaufort or Miss Alice. I did hear, however, that Captain Stuart was an old sweetheart of hers: but no, no; Miss Berners plays her cards better."

Margaret thought of Alice's agitation when Lilian Grant mentioned Captain Stuart's name. She perceived that the latter looked frequently towards Miss Berners, and that Alice as sedulously averted her eyes. Mr Somerton after a time rose and left her side. Alice sat quietly for two or three minutes, then she crossed the room, spoke to Miss Grant, and took a chair near to where Captain Stuart was stand-

ing. He turned and gazed silently, perhaps sorrowfully, upon her. A slight frown contracted Alice's smooth brow, and she leaned moodily with her elbow on the table, and turned over the leaves of a book.

"Well, Miss Margaret, these gimcracks and bedizened dames are new sights to you, I suppose?" exclaimed Mr Carnegie suddenly; for, during the time Margaret's attention was absorbed by Alice, he had amused himself with watching the play of her features. "How should you like to be mistress of such a place as Methwold?"

"It must be a very pleasant thing, I think. But I would not exchange conditions with Mrs Beaufort," replied Margaret, lightly.

"You would be a blockhead if you did!" was the uncourteous retort which Margaret thought issued, in reply, from Mr Carnegie's lips. Not over flattered by the politeness of the rejoinder, she raised her blue eyes in wondering astonishment to his face. At this moment Mr Somerton passed the couch on which they were sitting. He stopped and spoke to Mr Carnegie, who rose, and walked away to a short distance with him.

Suddenly Mr Carnegie approached again.

"Mr Somerton wishes for the honour of an intro-

duction to Miss Desmond," exclaimed he abruptly, in a tone which, despite the slight confusion Margaret felt, irresistibly disposed her to laugh. "Having said so much," continued he, "I don't know what other forms etiquette requires to make you known to each other; therefore, as I am going now to play the agreeable to Mrs Beaufort, you had better sit down, Somerton, and say everything I have omitted, and introduce yourself with proper ceremony!" and away Mr Carnegie walked.

Mr Somerton, evidently much amused, acted on Mr Carnegie's suggestion; and soon Margaret found herself sitting deep in conversation with him, whose reputed talents and kindness had so captivated her girlish imagination. A thrill of happiness seemed awakened in her heart, as she met the gaze of those full persuasive eyes; and never before had she felt herself talking with such enthusiasm and interest. All the embarrassment that she had imagined she should feel, in conversing with one so gifted, vanished as if by enchantment: for Mr Somerton possessed to perfection that exquisite art (which distinguishes the man of real learning and refinement from the mere pedagogue) of veiling the glitter of his attainments, by grace, and courtesy of demeanour;

so that, though none could be long in his society without acknowledging the versatility of his talents, yet their display never offended or wounded unnecessarily the self-complacency of another. She saw that he talked also with an earnest interest in their subject infinitely flattering. The feeling of sadness and depression, which but a few minutes before weighed so painfully, was dissipated; and she felt raised again to the level of those around her.

With something of the animated smile beaming on Mr Somerton's face, reflected on her own, Margaret presently glanced round the room. Alice still sat with her elbow on the table, her dark eyes bent gloomily on Margaret and her companion; and her brows—such beautiful brows—contracted with a sternness, giving an expression few could have imagined her sunny face capable of assuming. One hand, passing under her long flowing ringlets, supported her cheek, and partly concealed her face.

Suddenly she rose, and joined Lilian Grant and Mr Braddyll at the piano: for Mrs Beaufort had just signified her pleasure that some one should be asked to play. Alice, though a tolerable performer, could seldom be persuaded publicly to exercise her talent, on account of the blemish disfiguring her right hand

and wrist; now she flatly refused to strike a note. Mrs Beaufort presently joined the trio at the piano: after a short discussion Lilian Grant glided across the room.

"Mrs Beaufort has sent me to inquire, Miss Desmond, whether you can play or sing? If you are capable of doing either, she desires you will go immediately to the piano!" said Miss Grant, in her quiet sedate tones.

An indignant flush crimsoned Margaret's brow; and a haughty refusal to obey the command, so arrogantly put, rose to her lips. Mr Somerton did not speak; but his countenance testified his surprise. Mrs Beaufort stood in the attitude of expectation near the piano, evidently awaiting her obedience: for *she* knew what her young cousin's musical talent was. Margaret's spirit rebelled at the contemptuous tone of her message; but remembering that it was only on condition of obeying Mrs Beaufort in all things, save where conscience forbade, that she then mingled in a scene otherwise closed to her, she at length rose, and without deigning a reply to Lilian's rude speech, approached the piano.

"Miss Desmond indulges herself in a laughable notion of her own importance, considering that she is

only Mrs Beaufort's humble *dame de compagnie!*" observed Lilian insolently, addressing herself to Captain Stuart, but speaking very distinctly, so that her words were not lost on Mr Somerton.

"Indeed! Mrs Beaufort then is much to be envied!" replied Captain Stuart, quietly.

Meanwhile, Margaret seated herself at the piano. Mr Braddyll assiduously turned over the leaves of her music-book, every now and then applauding *sotto voce*, with the air and decision of connoisseurship. Margaret, however, felt indescribably wretched: the illusion which so recently buoyed up her spirits was cruelly dissipated. Mrs Beaufort's peremptory command had brought her down again to the level of her true position; that of a lowly dependant, bound to obey another's will. Mr Somerton never once approached the piano; neither did he pay her the compliment of listening to her music. Even her friend Mr Carnegie seemed to have forgotten her, and stood on the hearth-rug with his hands in his pockets, talking to Mr Somerton. Mrs Beaufort conversed with Sir James Somerton in low, earnest tones; her piercing black eyes, every now and then, glancing towards Alice. So Margaret, sick at heart, played on piece after piece as Mr Braddyll directed; her only auditor

being Lilian Grant, who placed herself on a low ottoman at the foot of the piano, and whose calm cautious eyes she frequently encountered; though she felt too careless to ascertain whether their expression denoted approval or disapproval of her performance.

Long after the music ceased, Alice stood apart in the recess of a window at the farthest extremity of the room, talking to Captain Stuart. As he spoke, her head drooped lower over the fragrant flower-stand against which she was standing. Her cheek was deeply flushed; and tears filled, and threw soft dreaminess of expression, and feminine gentleness, into her brilliant eyes. How different from the restless vivacity, and craving for admiration perceptible in her demeanour to Mr Somerton, was the maidenly confusion with which her beautiful head now bowed itself, beneath the unutterable love beaming from the clear brown eyes bent so earnestly upon her!

Then the highest, the most noble, and generous promptings of Alice's heart were roused: then she was yielding to the kindly influence of her better nature!

"Alice, Mrs Beaufort has asked me to prolong my stay over the next two days. I have consented, only in the hope of obtaining a long interview with you. When and where may I see you?"

Alice slightly shuddered. She took a short furtive glance round the room. Tears trembled on her long eyelashes.

"I will see you, Cuthbert, if ——" she paused, and then added hastily, "I shall walk alone to the boat-house to-morrow, at two o'clock."

Captain Stuart gazed for a moment into the clear eyes raised timidly upon him; a joyful smile beamed on his lips.

"My own Alice!" whispered he, triumphantly, as she gently withdrew her hand, and hastened from his side.

CHAPTER IX.

By the time the clock struck twelve, all Mrs Beaufort's guests had departed. Attended by Margaret, the latter retired when Lady Mary Somerton took her leave for the night; deputing Mrs Cecil to perform in her stead the task of hostess, till the last carriage rolled away with those heedless visiters, who, unmindful of her often administered rebukes, ventured to outstay the magic stroke of eleven. By midnight, however, the stately portal of Methwold Abbey closed behind the last of Mrs Beaufort's dinner guests, and the friends domiciled under her roof had all retired to their respective apartments.

In the drawing-room the wax lights of two of the chandeliers had been extinguished: the third, that at the upper end of the room, however, was merely lowered, and its candles still burned bril-

liantly. At the piano Lilian Grant and Mr Braddyll yet lingered. Miss Grant was collecting the music scattered over the instrument, and arranging it in a portfolio lying open before her: yet, strange to say, although Lilian seemed intent upon her occupation, the surface of the piano presented the same disorderly appearance as when Mrs Beaufort's friends departed. The firelight, as she stood, gleamed fitfully upon her white dress, and a feverish spot burned on her cheek. Mr Braddyll leaned with folded arms on the piano near her. Occasionally a furtive glance stole from beneath Lilian's heavy eyelids round the room, and then centred on her companion's face. Excepting this brief stealthy survey, and the unusual colour mantling her cheek, Miss Grant's manner was quiet and composed as ordinary.

"Lilian! I feel persuaded that Margaret Desmond and Leonard Somerton have met before. Their intimacy must be checked; or, I foresee, that the most disastrous results to our interest will ensue. Do you hear me, Lilian? You *must* crush this friendship in the germ!" said Mr Braddyll slowly, in low suppressed tones.

"Why should I trouble myself to cross the loves of Miss Margaret Desmond and Mr Somerton?

What are they to me?" replied Miss Grant, in a voice of sullen angry composure.

"Lilian! what possesses you to-night? Have you renounced my interest?"

"Your interest!" repeated Miss Grant, and a low laugh burst from her lips.

"My interest,—ours, Lilian; do you not know how fondly I love you?" and Mr Braddyll laid his burning hand on Lilian's; which was cold as marble.

"Oh, it is so long since you told me so, that I begin to doubt—yes, to doubt its reality. Oh, Mark! could I believe implicitly in your truth, I would peril body and soul in your cause!" exclaimed she passionately, turning towards him.

"Suspicion engenders suspicion, dearest: have I not reason also to doubt the faith of her who judges me so falsely?" replied Mr Braddyll, reproachfully. "But if you would hereafter reign mistress of Methwold Abbey, my Lilian, I tell you solemnly that every energy you possess must be put forth to prevent further intimacy between Mr Somerton and Margaret Desmond," added he, emphatically.

Lilian Grant remembered Margaret's distinct disavowal of any previous acquaintance with Mr Somerton; but she was too much of a woman, and, also,

too crafty a one, to relieve the anxiety of her lover by a statement of this fact.

"How can that pale-faced chit of a girl frustrate our projects? Mrs Beaufort is not likely to make a will in favour of her paid companion," responded she at length. Mark, tell me what you apprehend, unreservedly; or I will lend no aid to your designs!" added Lilian, quickly and doggedly.

"You are aware, Lilian, that Mrs Beaufort intends to make Leonard Somerton her heir, provided he marries Alice Berners. Let Mr Somerton become Alice's husband, then I possess sure means to prevent him from ever touching an acre of the Methwold estates. But, Lilian, with Margaret Desmond it is a different affair: she is a Beaufort; and, moreover, at her father's death, the sole representative of the family. Should Margaret, therefore, wed Leonard Somerton, what with Mrs Beaufort's prepossession in his favour, her own winning manners, and Mr Somerton's great family influence, our schemes for the future will be defeated: every precaution, therefore, must be taken to prevent this result. Do you understand, Lilian? I have a hold you little suspect on Agatha Beaufort."

"I see! Then Margaret Desmond is Mrs Beau-

fort's rightful heiress. I divined as much!" said Lilian, keenly scanning Mr Braddyll's countenance, while a slight frown gathered on her brow.

"Precisely! As soon as Alice is safely disposed of to Mr Somerton, means must skilfully be devised to drive this girl, Margaret, back to her obscurity: from which, with my consent, she never should have issued. Then we are safe."

Lilian gloomily smiled. A dark rankling hate of Margaret had sprung up in her bosom during that eventful evening, as she watched her, and her unwelcome, though obsequious companion, at the pianoforte. Mr Braddyll marked the workings of her countenance.

"Pray, how am I to achieve all this?" demanded she at length, resolutely, in a low suppressed tone.

"By stirring up the passions of fair Alice Berners. Rouse those demons of pride, ambition, and covetousness in her bosom. Do this, Lilian, discreetly and effectually, and we conquer—Methwold becomes our own."

Again Lilian smiled. Mr Braddyll threw his arm round her waist.

"You love me, Mark? You swear that you love me?" asked she passionately, whilst for once Lilian's

eyes were raised with wildness and intensity of doubt to his.

"Lilian! my own Lilian! why these unjust doubts? Will you never trust me? Dearest, why have I deserved this?" exclaimed Mr Braddyll, vehemently.

Lilian Grant raised her head; with a powerful effort she subdued her agitation: dark, resolute determination settled on her features.

"I believe you, Mark,—because my only hope in life rests on this trust! I will do your bidding to the best of my ability: yet, beware! the devil you evoke in me will bring a legion others!" She paused, and suddenly checked herself, while the menacing expression faded from her eye. "Good night, Mark," resumed she, after a long silence, in her usual quiet tones; then taking a candle from a side-table, without another glance at her lover, Lilian glided with noiseless step from the room.

A satirical expression of irrepressible mirth passed over Mr Braddyll's face; he then closed the piano, and advancing to the fire, leaned with his elbow on the mantel-piece, and stood wrapped in reverie, until the light shed by the glowing embers faded gradu-

ally away; then extinguishing the candles, he quitted the room.

Lilian Grant meanwhile proceeded towards Alice's chamber. Not the slightest trace of her conversation with Mr Braddyll was discernible on her features, and she moved along with the peculiar gliding gait habitual to her, as noiselessly and steadily as the light streaming from the candle in her hand flashed onwards before her. Now and then she paused, and looked back down the lofty galleries, with their profusion of decorations, which she had just traversed; and something of a triumphant smile flitted over her face—then it vanished, and she resumed her progress.

Lilian Grant owed her introduction to Methwold Abbey solely to Mr Braddyll. About four years previous to the commencement of our history she had been thrown, a penniless orphan, on the charity of her uncle, a surgeon in small practice in the neighbouring town of Denbridge, and was received into his family on condition of undertaking the education of his three children. Circumstances at the time rendered Miss Grant's compliance with these terms indispensable: indeed, such was then her embarras-

sing position that she would even gladly have accepted the post of dispenser of her uncle's drugs, thereby to purchase his favour and protection. When time, however, had somewhat blunted the feelings of shame and despair, amounting almost to frenzy, which overwhelmed her for long after she learned her destitute condition, and made her gladly hail a home, however humble, amongst her kindred—Lilian began to show indubitable symptoms that the occupation of governess to her cousins was an employment excessively irksome and distasteful; and one to which her spirit could by no means tamely bend.

In consequence, therefore, of the very negligent and inefficient manner in which she performed (or rather neglected altogether) her part of the arrangement, which insured to her the shelter of her uncle's roof, high words speedily ensued: but neither anger nor remonstrance the most urgent could awaken in her a sense of the duty and gratitude which she owed to those who had befriended her in her hour of need. Lilian listened in sullen, resentful silence: never condescending to utter a word of excuse for her conduct, or a promise to amend what was so displeasing to her relatives; who, much as they might desire it, were too poor to support her in idleness. At length, mu-

tual dissatisfaction reached its climax, and Lilian's uncle went the length of plainly desiring his niece to seek out another home; when an event occurred, insignificant as it at first seemed, which changed the current of Miss Grant's operations, and, for a time at least, converted her into a personage supple and accommodating as her relations could desire.

It chanced that one day Mr Braddyll slightly injured his hand, while shooting over a portion of the Methwold estate contiguous to the town of Denbridge. The wound bled profusely; and, ignorant what might be the extent and consequences of the hurt, Mr Braddyll hurried to the town to avail himself of the professional assistance of the first surgeon he met with. Seeing the name of "Thomson, Surgeon," inscribed in gigantic letters on the door of a house in the outskirts of the town, Mr Braddyll knocked, and from the little smiling obsequious man, who immediately presented himself in the dingy apartment beyond the surgery, yclept a consulting room, he speedily obtained the aid required.

Several successive visits to the surgeon's house, before the wound healed, procured for Mr Braddyll the honour of an introduction to Mr Thomson's indolent, sturdy-tempered niece Lilian. From that

day a total change became perceptible in Miss Grant's deportment. Mr Braddyll's visits were repeated, even when neither plaster nor poultice could be pleaded in excuse; and the assiduities of a personage, mighty in the favour and countenance of the redoubtable Mrs Beaufort (though the origin and motive of the extraordinary confidence and privileges enjoyed by Mr Braddyll at Methwold always puzzled the busy-bodies of the neighbourhood), contributed in no small degree to increase Lilian's importance in her uncle's household.

Affairs progressed in this fashion for the space of six months—Miss Grant angrily repelling any attempt to elicit from her the nature and intent of Mr Braddyll's attentions—until Alice Berners was expected at the Abbey. Mrs Beaufort, whose secluded habits necessarily consigned her visiters to their own resources for the greater part of the day, began then seriously to consider the evils of leaving her young, beautiful, and volatile guest for so many hours, and sometimes even days, companionless. Mr Braddyll immediately proposed Miss Grant, as a fit and suitable friend for the youthful Alice. He extolled the perfect respectability of her family and conduct; lauded her discretion and modesty; and spoke in raptures of her varied accomplishments.

Glad to be relieved from her difficulty, Mrs Beaufort soon authorized Mr Braddyll to propose the matter to Miss Grant, and also to request her uncle's sanction to the project. It was with a joy which sent the blood bounding through her veins, that the artful, ambitious Lilian listened to the proposal. She was too wary, however, and had reflected too deeply on her position, in its apparently most insignificant bearings, to accept the post of paid companion to Miss Berners; could she by the skilful exercise of her cunning obtain any other. Putting on an appearance of hesitation, therefore, she requested a few days to deliberate on Mrs Beaufort's offer.

During this interval, Lilian so successfully cajoled her uncle, and took advantage of his satisfaction at what he called "her promotion," as to extort from him a promise that his house should be her home, until her marriage with Mr Braddyll, whenever she chose to make it so. Armed with this assurance, Miss Grant next signified to Mr Braddyll, that it was not her intention to accept Mrs Beaufort's offer, unless she was received at Methwold without salary, and on equal terms with Alice, as a visiter; and that full liberty was allowed her to absent herself at pleasure from the Abbey: at the same time, Lilian made

a general promise to be always ready to give Miss Berners the benefit of her society whenever she was requested to do so.

There was something so novel in this apparent disinterestedness, that it charmed Mrs Beaufort; who knew not the cunning of the ambitious mind she had to deal with. Her prepossession being confirmed by Mr Braddyll's eloquent praise, and the adroit Lilian's humble, deprecating demeanour, during an audience of some minutes, to which she was admitted before Alice's arrival, Miss Grant's *début* at the Abbey was at length arranged to the entire gratification of her inordinate vanity.

Over Alice's affectionate nature, and fiery impulsive temper, Lilian soon gained sway. When the swift hurricane of passion arose, and Alice's spirit was roused and goaded almost to madness—often by the artful insinuations of her friend—Lilian stood cool and collected, ready to steer the tempest-tossed vessel into the haven whither she would have it anchor.

But to return to Lilian's midnight visit to Alice's chamber: a voice soft and low, differing greatly from the sparkling animation of Alice's usual tones, responded to her knock at the door, and bade her enter. Miss Berners was standing before the fire, enveloped

in a large white *peignoir*, her luxuriant hair streaming over her shoulders. Her face was paler, and its expression more subdued than ordinary. Lilian put down her candle, and stood a few minutes silently by her side; for Alice's glance and manner did not welcome her with their usual warmth: besides, there was a weariness in Miss Berners' mode of throwing herself into the chair near, almost betokening impatience at the intrusion on her retirement.

"You look fatigued to-night, dearest Alice—weary, I suppose, of reigning queen of hearts!" exclaimed Lilian at length; approaching, and gently putting back the tresses from Alice's brow, she pressed her lips on the white forehead beneath.

Miss Berners replied by an impatient gesture.

"Alice!" resumed Miss Grant, kneeling down on the hearth-rug, and playfully glancing into her friend's face, "Alice, you are pensive this evening. Would you still, as you vowed this morning, give half your future inheritance to have prevented Cuthbert Stuart's visit?"

A burning blush rose to Alice's brow.

"There is something so candid, manly, and honourable, in all Captain Stuart does or says, Lilian, which, whenever I meet him, makes me hate myself,

and heartily wish every word I have uttered against him unsaid!" rejoined Miss Berners hastily, with a touch of petulance in her tone.

"What would Leonard Somerton say, I wonder, Alice, could he hear this lowly confession, and listen to your praise of his rival?"

"I neither know nor care, Lilian: when I have finally accepted Mr Somerton's addresses, it will be time enough to consider his pleasure! Ever since Lady Mary has been visiting her son at Dingley, to please Mrs Beaufort, I have endured a daily martyrdom in playing the agreeable to a being languid and unamusable as her ladyship is!" replied Alice haughtily, turning aside her beautiful head.

"Your personal and mental gifts, dear Alice, raise you so far above other girls, that you can afford to be capricious—to smile upon your adorers one day, and to frown the next!" rejoined Miss Grant, caressingly. "Leonard Somerton, nevertheless, has advantages enough to commend even your allegiance, my darling Alice. Rich, and carrying the *prestige* of his opulence and talents wherever he goes; besides, finding himself generally the handsomest and most distinguished man present, in any room he enters; it is a pity Mr Somerton cannot make over

to that sensible, attractive Captain Stuart, even the overflowings of his cup of prosperity! Did you not once tell me, Alice dear, that Captain Stuart's commission comprises all his worldly wealth?" asked Lilian, in her most insinuating accents.

"Really, Lilian, Captain Stuart has never confided to me the extent of his pecuniary resources! He is good! His mind is great and noble; and he would sooner die than commit a dishonourable action! So would Leonard Somerton also: and I! when I compare myself to either of them—oh, Lilian, what a contrast do I then behold!" exclaimed Alice impetuously, tears filling her eyes.

"But Captain Stuart is so grave—so reserved, Alice. Besides, this white hand was never made to carry a soldier's knapsack: it must sparkle with gems, dearest, and rule hereafter with lighter sway over the Beaufort heritage, than does that of Methwold's present mistress!" Lilian paused: there was a passive resolution in Miss Berners' manner which she could not comprehend. "Did you observe Margaret Desmond this evening, Alice?" at length resumed she. "How preposterously she dressed herself out: but how pretty she looked! It strikes me, Alice, that were you to throw a little more animation

into your manner, you might perhaps find Mr Somerton as agreeable as Captain Stuart. I never saw anything more beaming and fascinating than his smile, whilst he conversed with Miss Desmond. He evidently courts and likes that indirect homage to his talents that she is only too ready to pay!"

The colour gathered on Alice's cheek. Lilian's eyes sought the ground with a well satisfied expression.

"You think so? Yet, Lilian, I happened to overhear a scrap of conversation between Mr Carnegie and Mr Somerton, anything but complimentary to Miss Desmond!" answered Alice, biting her rosy lip.

"But you know, Alice, a disdainful word from a lover's lips is not always to be taken in its literal sense: not, dear, that I mean to insinuate that Mr Somerton is likely to look twice at a little plebeian like Margaret Desmond; only it is to be hoped that the notice he has bestowed upon her may not turn her foolish head, with visions of reigning over the splendours of Woodthorpe Park; which she was describing to us *con amore* this morning. Mr Somerton must have known her before, Alice. Probably Miss Desmond is the village clerk's daughter, or something of the kind!" said Lilian, in her most non-

chalant manner, rising, and preparing to take her leave for the night.

"Probably; and this would account for Mrs Beaufort's strict injunctions that Margaret should never revert to her past history. I can fancy the agony Lady Mary suffered this evening, with her aristocratic prejudices, when she saw her idolized son flirting with Mrs Beaufort's companion!" rejoined Alice, angrily.

"Good night, dearest," said Miss Grant, as she stood twining one of Alice's shining ringlets round her finger. "Remember the proverb says, 'when poverty walks in at the door, love flies out of the window.' Look in the glass, dear Alice, and say whether that fair form was ever intended to shroud itself in poverty's humble garb, or to hide away from the world's admiring homage! It would remind one of the story of 'The Sleeper Awakened' in the Arabian Night Tales,—would it not, dearest, —were Margaret Desmond to rise some fine morning lady of Methwold and Woodthorpe?" exclaimed Lilian, indulging in a low satirical laugh.

The angry spot burned brighter on Alice's cheek. Miss Grant, however, quickly made her retreat, ere her friend replied; satisfied with the sensation her

words had produced, and actuated by much the same kind of feeling which might induce a poisoner to refrain from doubling his deadly dose,—not from any compassion for his miserable victim, but lest its too prompt effect should prematurely disclose his vile intent.

Alice passively witnessed her departure; and then the chaos of conflicting feelings, and powerful emotion found vent in tears. Alice seldom wept: there was a natural buoyancy in her disposition which in general successfully wrestled with depression; but when once her fortitude yielded, tears rained in torrents from her eyes, and her form quivered with passionate emotion. Like Marie de Medici, of whom it is recorded that in her stormy paroxysms of grief, the tears, instead of rolling down her cheeks, actually darted vehemently from her eyes, so Alice now wept, though with less frantic violence than the passionate queen; until, faint and exhausted, she leaned back on the pillow of her chair, and bowed her face on her folded hands.

Two vehement passions reigned in Alice's bosom; each in turn wrestling for the mastery, and each daily, nay, almost hourly, prompting actions which, under the influence of the counteracting principle

ever alive in her mind, became the source of the keenest regret and anguish. These two opposing powers were,—ambition, and her passionate attachment to Cuthbert Stuart.

In Alice, the longing for the magnificence, the luxuries, and pomps of earth clung with a tenacity apparently inseparable from her being. Her soul sickened with dismay, even at the inadequate picture imagination presented of the suffering entailed by poverty, privation, and obscurity. She had tasted the sweets of wealth; and, as yet, none of the anxieties and bitterness of spirit its possession generally brings. Her beauty enchanted all hearts; but, like the gorgeous colouring of some rare exotic, it paled under a wintry sky. Without the admiring homage of those around her,—without the sunshine of adulation, Alice's lively wit slumbered, her beaming eye became languid, and a restless longing for excitement rendered her irritable and impatient.

Warm and impulsive in her temper, Alice's actions too often sprang from the fiery promptings of the moment, seldom from innate principle. The seeds of envy and jealousy of all who interfered with her projects for gratifying the ruling passions of her heart, slumbered within—though little

did she divine it—ready to spring to life and vigour at the first subtle suggestion of the tempter.

Yet Alice, with her many defects of character and education, possessed a warm and sensitive heart. She was generous almost to a fault, and totally devoid of *personal* jealousy, or any of the littleness of that selfish depreciating spirit, which treacherously aims a covert blow at a neighbour's reputation or fame. To those whose presence, therefore, clashed not with Alice's besetting sin,—ambition,—she appeared one of the fairest, brightest, and most amiable of beings No ill-natured word ever dropped from Miss Berners' lips; no envious smile, jest, or ill-concealed pique, marred the sunny radiance which she shed on all around.

From the secret influence which Cuthbert Stuart exercised over Alice's mind, sprang all these best and most amiable traits of character; in her wildest bursts of passion, in the hour when her vanity and love of worldly grandeur met with keenest gratification, the thought of him—of his love, and of his earnest entreaties to her to guard against these besetting sins, for his sake—arose in her mind with softening, reproachful power. In such moments Alice loathed her past frivolities, and with much humiliation

of spirit set about the task of self-examination; and many then were her aspirations after that solid, sterling worth of character she had not strength to attain by her own efforts, and to possess herself of which she sought no higher aid.

With a character thus diversified, and at variance with itself—comprehending much that was good and noble, though unfortunately the evil too frequently predominated—Alice Berners, some two years before our story opens, returned home from Canada, on the death of her father, to reside with her aunt, Mrs Cecil. Colonel Berners held abroad a high permanent command; and his beautiful daughter early tasted the delights of reigning with omnipotent sway over the society in which she moved. Her meeting with Captain Stuart happened about a year previous to her arrival in England, and commenced with a catastrophe which all but proved fatal to Alice.

In the course of his duties, Colonel Berners had occasion officially to visit a distant military station, situated in a rude, uncivilized part of the country. As Alice's fond father was too prone to indulge her in all her most extravagant caprices, she met with but little opposition when she announced her intention of accompanying Colonel Berners on his expedition; as,

wearied with the monotony and sameness of her life, she panted for new scenes, and fresh excitement. Their journey was happily accomplished; and Alice and her maid took up their abode in a house situated at some short distance from that prepared for her father and his suite.

Charmed with the novelty of her position, the beauty of the scenery, and above all with the various conquests her bright eyes achieved amongst the officers quartered in this remote place, Alice one night retired to rest, thoroughly exhausted, after a long, fatiguing excursion to a distant part of the country, which had lasted the entire day. Her sleep was profound; but in the middle of the night she awoke, with a sensation of overpowering oppression, accompanied by an indistinct consciousness of a violent noise and tumult reigning around. She raised herself on her elbow, and tried to gaze about; but a drowsiness she could neither account for nor repel, made her sink back on her pillow. Again the confusion and shouts without roused her; attended this time by a sharp crackling sound, and a suffocating smell of burning wood. With a thrill of terror Alice started up; and wrestling with the stupor which overpowered her, she dashed back the bed-curtains. The

room was filled with dense smoke, through which Alice could nothing discern but the bright glare of flames curling round the beams and wainscotting of her chamber. The house was built of shingles; and the conflagration proceeded with awful rapidity, even during the few minutes Alice tremblingly gazed. With a scream of terror she sprang from the bed; a dizzy, sickening sensation overpowered her, and she grasped the curtains to keep herself from falling. Again the tumult from below ascended. Alice thought that she heard her own name eagerly repeated, and again she made another vain attempt to reach the window. The unutterable agony of the next few moments, before her consciousness failed, Alice ever remembered with horror; which, in after-life, whenever she alluded to it, produced a fit of violent nervous excitement. The heat of the apartment became insupportable: the flames hissed and roared sullenly round her bed; brilliant tongues of fire seemed to dart forth from amid the black curling vapour filling the room,—and she remembered no more.

In truth, such was the rapidity of the flames, that had Alice been exposed to their fury five minutes longer, her existence would soon have terminated.

The window of the room, however, was suddenly dashed in, and Captain Stuart, at the imminent peril of his life, sprang in, and approached the bed. The curtains had just ignited, and threw a red, lurid glare over Alice's beautiful form. One arm hung down, and rested on the flaming valance; yet, so profound was her stupor, that no appearance of suffering distorted her face, though Captain Stuart shuddered at the sight of the dreadful wound disfiguring her fair hand and wrist. To catch Alice up in his arms, and to bear her swiftly and safely away from this scene of peril, was but the work of a second; and then, as Colonel Berners clasped his daughter to his heart, words can feebly paint his joy and thankfulness, or the warmth of his grateful acknowledgments to her deliverer.

Miss Berners recovered very slowly from the shock, and for many weeks afterwards her health remained in a most precarious condition. The wound on her arm, likewise, long baffled every attempt to heal it; and after all, when its cure was accomplished, not all the resources of surgical art could prevent that frightful disfigurement of the once perfect hand and arm, which had so excited Margaret's curiosity and wonder.

Meanwhile, Captain Stuart was the privileged and favoured attendant of the invalid. His character, calm, reflective, and dispassionate—the very opposite, therefore, to Alice's—soon gained extraordinary ascendency over her. He spoke to her heart, to her intellect, to her principles—all responded beneath the magic touch; and Alice Berners, unwon by any of the crowd of trifling adorers of her beauty and wit, yielded her heart to the only man who had had manly dignity enough to repose on his own character to obtain her regard, without once seeking to enhance his suit, further than strict truth would permit, by playing upon her besetting foible—vanity.

Though for the six months previous to her departure from Canada, Captain Stuart was Alice's constant companion, and all but acknowledged suitor, he had never formally asked her to become his wife, or sought to bind her faith by exacting the slightest promise; though the fullest understanding of their mutual position to each other subsisted. Captain Stuart's fortune was small: Alice's a mere trifle, though her father's income, from professional appointments, was a large one. Perhaps Alice's luxurious habits, and lavish expenses, justly caused

Captain Stuart to hesitate, ere, for her own sake, he suffered her to plight her faith to him, and bind herself to marry a man whose income would amount to less than she had been yearly in the habit of squandering in trifles.

Before Alice sailed for England, Captain Stuart, in their farewell interview, placed upon her wounded hand the gorgeous ring she still constantly wore. It was an ancient and singular family jewel, bearing the motto, "le jour viendra." With passionate vehemence Alice pressed the ring to her lips, as she received it from Captain Stuart's hand, vowing never again to lay it aside; and tears of trustful hope sprang to her eyes as she read its motto.

Again, while she sat in her stately chamber at Methwold Abbey, after Lilian's departure, Alice drew the precious ring from her finger, and tears once more fell upon and dimmed its lustre: she read its motto—"le jour viendra"—and a ray of joy swept across her face. With hurried step she arose, opened a bureau, took therefrom a small miniature case, and reseated herself at her toilette. With her elbows resting on the table, and her hands clasped across her brow, to still its painful throbbing, Alice sat with the miniature before her.

Captain Stuart's features, as delineated in the portrait, were not regularly handsome; but intellect had set her stamp upon the broad, open brow, and sparkled in the clear, brown eye. The predominant expression of his face was thoughtful decision. The mouth was sweet and serious-looking; a short, well-trimmed moustache grew over the upper lip, and the round and firmly-cut chin implied a resolution of character which Captain Stuart's disposition did not belie.

Had Alice, after her arrival in England, remained longer under Mrs Cecil's care, her present sharp, though most unworthy conflict, might probably have been spared her; and she would have been by this time Captain Stuart's happy, contented wife. Subdued by the change wrought in her circumstances by her father's sudden death, Alice, fallen from her high estate, was better inclined to receive and benefit by her aunt's judicious counsels. Mrs Beaufort's invitation, however, unfortunately arrived; and with a burst of triumphant joy, inexplicable to Mrs Cecil, her niece prepared to enter on her new and glittering career. Captain Stuart's return home, on furlough, from abroad was hourly expected; yet Alice, with a presentiment that the prospect she so

joyfully hailed would not afford her lover equal satisfaction, hastened her departure from Scotland.

From the day of her arrival at Methwold Abbey, Alice's trial began. A week or two after that event, Mrs Beaufort put the crowning point to her young cousin's exultation, by mysteriously hinting that the ultimate possession of Methwold Abbey itself, was a prize not too glittering to be aspired to, provided Alice was fortunate enough to attract Mr Somerton's approval. Then the conflict arose in Alice's bosom: wealth, honours, distinctions the most alluring, lay at her feet, awaiting but appropriation.

Mr Somerton, it was true, was not that ardent lover her vanity demanded: he admired her beauty, was fascinated at first by her wit; and, in obedience, it was whispered, to the urgent request of his father, Sir James Somerton, was content to show her public homage, whilst he took time to consider whether Mrs Beaufort's reputed rich and beautiful heiress would suit him as a wife: and few there were who looked on Alice and doubted what his decision would be.

As for Alice herself, she felt assured of her conquest; and, in truth, until Margaret's arrival, not a suspicion rose in her bosom that her conviction might, after all, be a fallacious one. To be rivalled,

perhaps successfully—to have her garland of worldly honours roughly snatched from her, at the moment that she was deliberating whether to bind it on her brow, was humiliation too intolerable for Alice's spirit to contemplate. Lilian Grant knew well the pride, towering and mighty, which reigned in her friend's heart.

At length Alice closed the miniature case. A deep sigh escaped her lips, and she once more approached the fire. What were her sentiments for Leonard Somerton? Fascinated by his handsome person, and the grace and vivacity of his conversation, for a brief period she had imagined that she could return his assumed attachment. Soon, however, the delusion vanished: her affection, she found, was irretrievably another's; and thenceforth her demeanour to Mr Somerton became a treacherous lure which nothing could justify. Judging Leonard Somerton by the feelings agitating her own heart, Alice, nevertheless, thought that the prospect of eventually inheriting Methwold must insure her conquest; but now the first glimmering of conviction dawned upon her mind, that perchance his wife's mind and character might be matters as interesting to Mr Somerton as the amount of her inheritance.

Could she permit herself,—she, the all but acknowledged heiress of Methwold Abbey, to be despoiled of what she had for so many months regarded as her future heritage, and condemned, whether she would or not, to a life of poverty, by the artful lures of Mrs Beaufort's dependant? Should she not, therefore, abandon herself to her ambitious designs, and avoid further intercourse with Captain Stuart during his stay in the neighbourhood? Temptation was busy at her heart: Lilian Grant, her words and her counsels, rose up before her.

Alice Berners meditated; with what result will afterwards appear.

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET, meantime, followed Mrs Beaufort when she quitted the drawing-room.

In silence they proceeded through the picture gallery; Mrs Beaufort's stately figure, as she walked forwards, lamp in hand, rendered still more imposing by the ample folds of her purple velvet gown, which swept the ground. Every now and then she raised the light, and rapidly glanced on the portraits as she passed. Margaret's heart beat almost audibly as they approached the picture of the Lady Mabel; and a shuddering dread crept over her as she looked at Mrs Beaufort, and felt herself alone with her: as, for aught she knew, that uncontrolled passion which brought perdition to the original of that bright picture, might be burning in her heart also. The same fierce, impetuous blood circled

in Mrs Beaufort's veins; and, with the beauty of her ancestress, was it not possible that she might also have inherited the Lady Mabel's dark, relentless character?

Anxiously, therefore, did Margaret watch Mrs Beaufort's demeanour as she passed the picture. Would the pale, transparent-looking apparition flash upon them, to warn and testify, that neither in this world nor the next is there repose for the wicked, and that as the tree falleth so will it lie to all eternity? Not a pause, nor a gesture, however, did Mrs Beaufort make, until she reached the door at the extremity of the gallery. Here she paused, and deliberately raising her lamp, surveyed the picture marked "Edith Beaufort;" then her gaze fell long and searchingly on Margaret. Having thus apparently satisfied her curiosity, Mrs Beaufort, without a word tending to enlighten Margaret as to what was passing in her mind, resumed her progress towards her own apartments.

Near the door of the tapestried gallery, Cartaret met her mistress: her face looked flushed and anxious; her brows were bent, and Margaret remarked a ruffled negligence in the prim, quaker-like neatness of her usual attire. As soon as she per-

ceived Cartaret, Mrs Beaufort turned, and with an imperious gesture waved Margaret back; then advancing a few steps, so as effectually to guard against her conversation being overheard, began a low and earnest conference with her maid. Their mysterious colloquy lasted, it might be, about ten minutes, and Cartaret then retired through the gallery. Mrs Beaufort beckoned then for Margaret to approach her.

"This evening, Margaret, I have no further need of your services; you may therefore retire to your room, which I hope you find comfortable, and as you like it. We shall meet early to-morrow morning, as I breakfast below: at ten o'clock precisely I expect to see you in my sitting-room," said she.

There was now deep sadness in the full tones of Mrs Beaufort's voice; and her words falling, divested of her usual frigid utterance, sounded strangely in Margaret's ear. When the latter ventured to look up, there was suppressed emotion, or rather passive endurance, marked on Mrs Beaufort's pale chiselled face; and tremulous shadows floated in those dark, deep eyes, replacing their usual unflinching, steady gaze. Insensibly Margaret's heart soft-

ened: she felt irresistibly impelled to harbour warmer, kindlier feelings, and to try to gain the love, perhaps also the confidence, of her proud, reserved kinswoman. Again she looked eagerly into Mrs Beaufort's face: a smile, the first cordial smile Margaret ever beheld her vouchsafe, now parted her full, round lips. She presently extended her hand; Margaret took it, and raised it to her lips. She fancied the act was acknowledged by a slight pressure; then Mrs Beaufort withdrew her hand, and entering her apartments, hastily closed the door.

Long that night Margaret sat and mused on the strange variableness of Mrs Beaufort's character, and on the extraordinary elements of which her household was composed.

Whilst she was employed, early the following morning, in condensing the substance of her midnight reveries into a letter to her father, Alice entered the room, to invite her to walk before breakfast. During the night there had been a rapid thaw; and now the morning sun shone brightly, and the leafless trees displayed their delicate fretwork of twigs and branches on a sky of transparent blue. Wishing much to walk through the gardens and grounds, Margaret gladly complied with Alice's request; feeling also

that her enjoyment would be much increased by the absence of Lilian Grant: who, Alice laughingly declared, was too devoted a worshipper of the god Morpheus, ever willingly to interrupt her repose at so early an hour, for the sake of a morning stroll. Margaret quickly arrayed herself for her walk, and soon, with her arm linked within Alice's, she strolled out into the clear bracing air.

"Well, Margaret, this is the first opportunity we have had for exchanging a few words together since yesterday morning!" exclaimed Alice, when, after taking Margaret through the flower-garden and conservatories, she turned into a terraced walk, sheltered by thick plantations. "How did your interview go off with Mrs Beaufort? What do you think of her?"

"I found Mrs Beaufort very kind, though of course rather formidable in her manner at first. I think I shall like her very much!" replied Margaret, still under the influence of her softened feelings of the previous evening.

"That was precisely my feeling, Margaret, when first introduced to Mrs Beaufort. How strange, that her chilling *hauteur* does not inspire *us* with those sentiments of fear and dislike which it invariably pro-

duces on others! What are your occupations to be?"

Margaret remembered Mrs Beaufort's emphatic prohibition against reporting anything that occurred in her apartments.

"Her instructions, dear Alice, were of course given in very general terms: Mrs Beaufort expects my attendance in her sitting-room from ten o'clock until luncheon time. My first occupation, I suppose, will be to arrange some old papers and letters!" at length replied Margaret. She had, however, no sooner uttered the last sentence, than she wished it unsaid. Alice's bright piercing eyes testified, plainly as words could do, that she had committed an error.

"The papers, I presume, contained in the curious Venetian cabinet in Mrs Beaufort's bedchamber?" at length said Miss Berners, slowly: then she added, somewhat ironically, perceiving Margaret's hesitation, "You need not play the mysterious with me, Margaret: what Mrs Beaufort intrusts to you, she would surely confide to me—her heiress! Are you going to look over these papers I allude to, Margaret?" demanded Alice, haughtily.

"I cannot reply to your question, Alice. Mrs

Beaufort prohibited me from betraying to any one the commands she gave me; my duty, therefore, is silence. Your best plan will be to seek information from Mrs Beaufort herself on the subject," coolly replied Margaret.

Alice looked greatly displeased: she, however, suffered the subject to drop.

"Mr Carnegie's scarlet camellia, yesterday, nearly overturned my gravity when he entered the room. Really, Margaret, one might augur some future very happy event from his attentions to you: I never heard him, before your arrival, speak civilly to any woman; while his whole conversation used to be one shameless *tirade* on their fickleness and hypocrisy!" exclaimed Alice at length, merrily, and with recovered good humour. "Do you know, Margaret, my suspicion would be strongly kindled (for old men sometimes take strange fancies into their heads), but for a little secret Mr Somerton most maliciously betrayed, and which I unluckily overheard, to the utter confusion of my contemplated romance!"

"Mr Somerton! What secret could he possibly reveal?" and Margaret's blue eyes rested with intense curiosity upon her companion. "What can you mean, dear Alice? Mr Somerton, knowing

nothing of me, cannot be in possession of any secret in which I am concerned."

Alice walked on, assiduously plucking the red haws from a small branch of thorn in her hand; and soon her cheek rivalled in colour the brilliant berries she so petulantly tossed from her.

"Not even by virtue of his father's manorial rights and privileges, Margaret? Do you think that the prettiest girl in Woodthorpe could betroth herself unknown to Mr Somerton?" asked Alice, demurely.

In a moment Margaret recollected her meeting with Mr Somerton, when George Compton was walking with her: she remembered also her intense vexation at the time. Poor Margaret! all things seemed to combine against her comfort. A flush of mortified pride mantled her brow, as she replied warmly.

"If Mr Somerton made such an assertion, Alice, it was not said with his usual courtesy; nor with a regard to that strict veracity for which he has the reputation!"

"Excellent, Margaret! I wish Mr Somerton could hear you! Nevertheless, I perceive that you do not deny the imputation."

"Totally, Alice. I do not deny that Mr Somerton may have seen me once or twice in company

with a certain personage resident at Woodthorpe, whose attentions were anything but acceptable to me; but if a betrothment is proclaimed on such trivial evidence, few would be safe from the imputation! Tell me, dear Alice, I entreat, exactly the words you overheard."

Miss Berners hesitated: she perceived that Margaret's spirit was roused.

"You ask me in so earnest a tone, Margaret, that 'tis impossible to refuse your request; much as I disbelieve the statement, and deprecate Mr Somerton's bad taste in indulging in such gossip. Remember, dear Margaret, that I now only mechanically repeat what I overheard: I can neither vouch for its truth, nor testify its falsehood. Mr Carnegie, in his usual abrupt manner, was questioning Mr Somerton, whilst you were at the piano, respecting your family; and putting many impertinent questions of a very personal nature regarding yourself. Mr Somerton disclaimed any knowledge of your parents, whom he represented as low, vulgar people, living in most straitened circumstances in a cottage on his father's estate. As for yourself, he said, that he understood you had long been engaged to marry a thriving young farmer of the name of Compton; a match all your

friends rejoiced at exceedingly, as one infinitely (he seemed to insinuate) above your pretensions." Alice paused; she turned to Margaret, whose eyes were filled with tears. "I regret that I yielded to your request, Margaret, and repeated this slander—for slander I feel sure it is. Do you forgive me?"

Margaret's proud blood boiled; though Mr Somerton's contemptuous, patronizing way of speaking of her filled her with the keenest sorrow, and disappointment.

"Forgive you, Alice, when it was I who imposed the ungrateful task upon you? Believe me, I can bear most courageously the momentary chagrin your words have roused; for Mr Somerton's assertion is one tissue of misrepresentation throughout," responded she, at length, indignantly.

A well satisfied smile flitted across Alice's face: she hastened then to change the conversation. Their walk had led them by a circuitous route, back again to the front of the mansion.

"How sparkling the lake looks this morning, Margaret, with its dark background of majestic trees! Oh, this old abode of the Beauforts is a noble place!" exclaimed Alice, and her eyes wandered exultingly round. "When I am mistress here," continued she,

"I will have that clump of evergreen oaks cut down, so that the beautiful Priory ruins may be seen from every part of the lake——"

"Then Miss Berners would not act with the good taste we all give her the credit of possessing!" exclaimed a voice from behind, which made Alice start, and then blush crimson.

To be caught openly speculating on plans for the future, dependent upon certain contingencies, such as the decease of another person, is not a very pleasant circumstance; as it implies a want of delicacy and self-command not over flattering to the taste or judgment.

"Nay, Mr Somerton, my project, at first hearing, sounds a little barbarous towards the poor oak trees, I grant; still, the prospect from the house would be so greatly improved by their removal, that I do not despair yet of bringing Mrs Beaufort over to my opinion, and perhaps yourself also!" rejoined Alice, with prompt playfulness of manner; and with one of her most brilliant smiles she extended her hand to Mr Somerton, who, unperceived by the young ladies, had joined them on the lawn, where Alice's observation on the beauty of the scenery had made them pause.

"I fear your eloquence would fail to convince me,

Miss Berners, that any advantage would be gained by stripping yonder beautiful ruin of its screen of foliage. I hope you will not signalize your accession here, to which I think I heard you allude, by so remorseless a deed!" rejoined Mr Somerton; then turning towards Margaret, he held out his hand, saying, "Mr Carnegie was much disappointed at your sudden disappearance from the room yesterday evening, Miss Desmond, without taking leave of him!"

Margaret, however, was not to be propitiated by the marked courtesy of Mr Somerton's manner; for she felt far too wounded and offended at the way in which he had spoken of her, to be pleased, or flattered by any notice he might henceforth vouchsafe. Withdrawing her hand, therefore, she coldly bowed; then turning towards Alice, whose bright eyes were fixed upon her, said,

"I am going in now, dear Alice: it must be nearly, if not quite, Mrs Beaufort's breakfast hour;" and, without hazarding another glance at Mr Somerton, Margaret walked away and entered the house.

Her first impulse was to fly to her chamber. Had her resentment been too strongly manifested? What would Mr Somerton think of her altered manner? Would he ascribe her discourtesy and abruptness to

lack of refinement and knowledge of the world, and so, instead of feeling rebuked for his misrepresentations to Mr Carnegie, charitably make up his mind to tolerate and excuse her ignorance?

Margaret would have sat indulging some considerable time longer in thoughts so little comforting and agreeable, had not the sound of the gong announced that breakfast was ready. She rose, and, after hurriedly smoothing her ringlets, descended to the breakfast-room.

Most of the company had taken their seats round the table, at which Mrs Beaufort presided. Mr Somerton stood reading a newspaper near the window; when she entered the room, unabashed by her late rebuff, he instantly advanced towards her, smiled, and then drew back the chair, placed opposite to Mrs Beaufort, for her to sit down. Margaret's cheek crimsoned; but whether her colour rose from the glow of early exercise, resentment, or from any other cause, she alone is competent to decide. She hesitated, however, before taking possession of the conspicuous seat offered to her, and stood looking very pretty in her embarrassment; though with a little secret irritation lurking at heart, that Mr Somerton had failed to take the hint administered,

as she hoped, with such effect before breakfast. Still there he calmly stood, looking down upon her with his dark brilliant eyes not a particle of pique, resentment, or restraint visible in his manner.

"Miss Desmond, will you be kind enough to pour out the coffee, and take your seat, and allow Mr Somerton to do so likewise?" said Mrs Beaufort, in impatient tones from the top of the table.

Margaret hurriedly obeyed; and with some confusion commenced her task. Mr Somerton, however, appeared not the least inclined to avail himself of Mrs Beaufort's hint; for he still continued to stand by Margaret's chair, talking, despite her cold repelling tones, with that highbred ease of manner and lively gaiety which infallibly pleases every woman's fancy, be she peasant or duchess: and that often, moreover, achieves the conquest of her heart. Nevertheless, look as disdainfully reserved as she might, and decline all assistance with her loftiest and most ceremonious courtesy, still Mr Somerton persisted in his attempt to draw Margaret into conversation. She could have wept for vexation; for what other motive was it possible to assign to his assiduity, except an insulting resolve to show her that the displeasure of a personage so utterly insignificant as herself could not

affect him: nay, so totally was it beneath his notice that he scorned even to resent it.

This persuasion sealed still more closely our heroine's lips; and her very laconic answers having at length dwindled down into brief monosyllables, Mr Somerton (disgusted as she supposed with her rustic shyness, or stupidity) left her side, and betook himself to the vacant chair by Alice; who, looking fresh and fair as a rose-bud, sat by Mrs Beaufort. It was some consolation, however, for Margaret to think that, at last, her ungracious demeanour had produced its intended effects. She had now satisfied her wounded vanity: and had shown Mr Somerton that, low and vulgarly born as were her parents, their daughter at any rate possessed sufficient spirit and dignity to reject the specious advances of an individual who considered her so much beneath him: yet a feeling of indescribable sadness rose within her.

She had probably for ever deprived herself of the pleasure of listening again to that low earnest voice, which had addressed her in such kindly accents on the previous evening. What must Mr Somerton also think of her conduct, after his generous assistance to her father—to which she had never even distantly alluded.

So occupied was Margaret by her thoughts, that, had she been called upon to join in conversation, her presence of mind must have failed; but no one spoke to her: Mr Somerton and Mrs Beaufort were conversing together. An unusual shade of gravity now replaced the sparkling animation of Alice's charming face: opposite to her sat Captain Stuart, talking at long intervals with Lady Mary; who looked fragile and delicate as a snowdrop, in her morning-dress.

Lilian Grant occupied the seat on Margaret's right hand; on her left was a vacant chair, which in a few minutes Mr Braddyll appropriated. As he took his seat, Margaret thought of that other companion she might probably have had, had her deportment been more courteous and encouraging. Miss Grant presently glanced steadily at Mr Braddyll; and Margaret then perceived her gaze fixed, with a significant unpleasant expression, on Alice and Mr Somerton.

Mr Braddyll acknowledged Lilian's prolonged notice by a familiar inclination of the head, and then began a series of fluent observations to Margaret. Without paying the slightest attention to her evident disinclination to converse, Mr Braddyll perseveringly talked on; when, luckily for Margaret, he suddenly remembered that Mrs Beaufort never

made her guests pay for the indolence or unpunctuality of any member of her household, by keeping them prisoners at the breakfast-table after they had finished their own meal: which a glance round the table warned him was now nearly the case; consequently, with an assurance (anything but consolatory to poor Margaret) that they could more conveniently pursue their conversation in Mrs Beaufort's apartments, where he hoped to meet her during the morning, Mr Braddyll applied himself in right good earnest to make most of the time remaining to him.

Mrs Beaufort invariably retired immediately after breakfast; leaving her guests to their own resources, or the companionship of Miss Berners, until luncheon time. Margaret, consequently, waited only about five minutes in the boudoir, ere she was summoned to the mysterious apartment where she had been before introduced. On entering, it struck Margaret that the room presented a more disorderly appearance than it had done on her previous visit: a massive old-fashioned couch was wheeled from its proper position, and stood close to the fire; its large pillows were tossed carelessly about, and bore marks of some one having recently reclined thereon. A strong odour of ether, or of some spirituous fluid, also

pervaded the room. A single moment sufficed Margaret for all these observations: perhaps her lonely position, and the mystery which she fancied abounded at Methwold, made her note trifles that otherwise would have passed unnoticed.

Mrs Beaufort was reserved and cold in her manner; but still, now and then, Margaret thought a kindlier and more approving glance beamed from her eye. Without vouchsafing any previous conversation, she placed a book of accounts in Margaret's hand, and indicating the columns she wished her to add up, bade her retire to the adjoining room. As soon as her task was completed, Mrs Beaufort directed her to leave the book on the table, and then immediately repair to the drawing-room to help Alice Berners to entertain Lady Mary Somerton; whose delicate health confined her to the sofa during the greater part of the morning.

Margaret needed no stimulus to be diligent: the thought of Mr Braddyll's promised visit gave wings to her fingers. She set assiduously about her task, and had nearly accomplished it, when he entered. Seeing her attention riveted on her occupation, Mr Braddyll passed onwards without speaking. Matgaret redoubled her diligence; in a few minutes her

task was finished: she joyfully placed the book where Mrs Beaufort desired, and quitted the room; feeling that, for the morning at least, all danger of a private interview with Mr Braddyll was over.

At luncheon, Mr Somerton neither addressed nor took the slightest notice of Margaret; and she had the pleasure of perceiving that her repulse at last had been effectual. On re-entering the drawing-room the ladies found Mr Carnegie awaiting them there; for he had declined Mrs Beaufort's proposal, and refused to join the party at luncheon. After some conversation, Captain Stuart walked to the window, and looked at his watch; then with a quick, and as Margaret thought, meaning glance at Alice, who stood apart talking with Lilian, he approached the door, evidently with the intention of leaving the room.

"I say, Captain Stuart, I want to speak to you before you go out to walk: I came here on purpose to call upon you, hoping to induce you to give me the pleasure of your society at the Holt to-morrow for a few days," exclaimed Mr Carnegie, taking his place in the middle of the hearth-rug with his back to the fire.

Mrs Beaufort raised her head from her work, and darted such a glance upon Mr Carnegie, that, had

that gentleman possessed even a common modicum of deferential reserve, it would have sufficed to awe him into silence for some considerable time to come.

"I hoped that Captain Stuart intended to give me the pleasure of his company at Methwold, for as long as he finds it agreeable to remain in this neighbourhood," said she, at length, in tones of stately courtesy.

"I thought, madam, you yourself informed me yesterday evening, that Captain Stuart was only going to remain here until to-morrow. Women are all alike, I declare! Fix upon a pleasant scheme, and they are sure to circumvent it, if they can!" retorted Mr Carnegie, turning towards Mrs Beaufort.

"I trust Captain Stuart will unreservedly follow his own inclinations. I repeat, that I shall be glad to see him here for as long as he can bestow his company upon us," replied Mrs Beaufort, with more forbearance than might have been anticipated.

Captain Stuart stood irresolute. He glanced at Alice: her head was averted, and she still continued talking with Miss Grant. Mr Carnegie fidgeted about.

"I have accepted Mrs Beaufort's kind invitation to remain her guest until after the Denbridge ball;

which, you know, is fixed for to-morrow evening. I suppose we shall meet in the ball-room; then, if nothing intervenes to prevent, I will gladly spend a few days at the Holt," replied Captain Stuart, cordially.

"Well, well! only please yourself,—any time will suit me," rejoined Mr Carnegie, carelessly. "I suppose you, ladies, have had many debates on gauzes, and such like trumpery; and the characters you are to assume to-morrow evening. If I had not seen it announced a week ago, by a bill sticking on a wall in Denbridge, that you, Mr Somerton, were going to officiate as steward on the occasion, I should not have gone near this ball. I hate travesty of any kind! Pray, madam, in what character do you mean to appear?"

"No character can so well become Mrs Beaufort as her own," replied Mrs Beaufort, coldly.

"You are right there, ma'am," retorted Mr Carnegie, with a promptness that drew all eyes upon him. "And pray, Mr Somerton, in what new guise are we to see you?"

"Oh, I shall wear my uniform," replied Mr Somerton, glancing up from his book.

"And you, Miss Berners? If I might venture to

offer my humble opinion to a young lady of such acknowledged taste as yourself, I should say that the rôle, and costume of Queen Mary Stuart, would suit you well. What do you think, Captain Stuart?" asked Mr Carnegie, with a malicious smile. Alice coloured deeply: much to her relief, however, Captain Stuart had just quitted the room. In an instant or two she raised her head impatiently; the more so, as she perceived that Mr Somerton was likewise expecting her answer.

"You and I, Mr Carnegie, seem ever destined to disagree in matters of taste and of opinion: I flatter myself that few characters could be more diametrically opposed to my own than that of the fickle Scottish Queen. The Stuarts are no favourites of mine; nor, in short, are any of their costumes or characteristics," responded Alice, at length, bending over her embroidery frame. "No;" continued she, after a pause, "I have almost decided upon personating the Empress Nourmahal: her attire might be rendered so rich and picturesque. Do you not think so, Mr Somerton?"

"Very, indeed: the robes of an Eastern empress cannot fail to be so. I think I should prefer a simpler

costume, nevertheless," responded Mr Somerton, quietly, without looking up from his book.

"But you know that the 'Light of the Harem' was not always an empress——"

"There you are right, Miss Alice. History testifies that this same beautiful Nourmahal, whom you seem to admire, broke one true heart which opposed itself to her ambitious projects! I appeal to all here present, whether the character which I proposed implied not a greater compliment to your personal and mental charms than that you have yourself selected."

Again Alice blushed; and, with an angry toss of her head, bent still lower over her work.

"I have already bespoken for the beauteous Nourmahal the choicest bouquet of exotics that London can yield," said Mr Braddyll, gallantly.

A slight inclination from Alice's stately head testified that she heard; though she did not raise her eyes, but continued working steadily. A smile curled Lilian Grant's lips; for although she was sitting by Lady Mary Somerton on the sofa, striving diligently to accomplish the task she had earnestly solicited, of teaching her ladyship a new stitch in knitting, she did not lose a syllable of the conversation going on

around her. Mr Carnegie stood by the fire, with his hands thrust behind his back, his pale blue eyes wandering vacantly round the room. At length they riveted themselves on the portrait of Mr Desmond; which, from some inexplicable caprice, judging by her conduct in other respects, Mrs Beaufort still permitted to adorn the walls of the saloon.

"Pray, madam, may I take the liberty of inquiring who the original of that portrait is? I never saw a more gentlemanlike pleasant-looking personage," said he, keeping his eye fixed on the picture.

Apparently Mrs Beaufort did not hear the question; for just at the moment she rose, and took a seat on the sofa near Lady Mary. Mr Carnegie's curiosity, however, seldom remained ungratified for lack of urgent demand; he therefore repeated the inquiry. This time Alice took upon herself to answer.

"That picture, I believe, is the portrait of a nephew of the late Sir John Beaufort's. You need not ask me more, Mr Carnegie, for I am not sufficiently versed in the genealogy of the Beauforts, to afford you further information," replied she, quickly, with pretty scorn. "Margaret, I want to speak to you! Do, pray, come hither!" continued Alice. Miss Desmond silently rose, and placed herself by

Miss Berners on the divan. "Are you going with us to the ball to-morrow evening?"

Mr Carnegie, who was just indulging in some very sarcastic speech, relative to the propensity of the Beauforts to claim kindred with every handsome face delineated on canvass in the house—including saints, angels, and even the Venus de Medici herself—here broke off abruptly, and fixed his keen eyes on Margaret and her friend.

"I never heard that there was to be a ball at Denbridge until this minute, Alice: I do not know whether Mrs Beaufort wishes me to go," replied Margaret, hastily glancing at Mrs Beaufort, whose change of position had brought her close enough to hear any conversation passing at Alice's work-table.

"Surely, Miss Desmond, you will not be cruel enough to refuse us the pleasure of your company?" exclaimed Mr Braddyll earnestly, looking intently at Mrs Beaufort.

"And the ball, likewise, under Mr Somerton's patronage! Why do you not rise, sir, and formally petition for the honour of Miss Desmond's presence?" said Mr Carnegie, bluntly.

Mr Somerton smiled one of his quiet pleasant smiles.

"I am sure no interest of mine is needed to induce Mrs Beaufort to accede to a request, which, if agreeable to Miss Desmond, will add so very much to the enjoyment of her friends!" said he at length, with ready tact.

Margaret's eyes sparkled: she wished much to make one of the party to the ball.

"There need not be any incertitude about the matter. I intend to take Miss Desmond to the ball to-morrow evening," interposed Mrs Beaufort, coldly, whilst a slight colour suffused her face.

"But your dress, dear Margaret — your dress! How shall we manage in this short space of time?" exclaimed Alice, playfully, putting on an air of mimic consternation.

"Alice, you will oblige me by confining your attention to your own attire!" said Mrs Beaufort, displeased apparently that the conversation and attention of every one present was centred on Margaret. "Miss Desmond's dress and character will be consistent with the position she occupies in my household," added she, decisively.

"Like master, like man! One just as much in character as the other, I protest! Truly there is enough masquerading in real life, without going in

pursuit of it at a ball! Pray, madam, as I always take you for my guide on such occasions, at what hour is it etiquette to make one's appearance in the room to-morrow evening?" asked Mr Carnegie, in a tone of concentrated bitterness.

Every eye turned on Mrs Beaufort. None dared accost her in the tone of insolent familiarity habitual to Mr Carnegie: yet, for some inexplicable reason, his visits were tolerated at the Abbey.

"I shall enter the ball-room at ten o'clock precisely," replied she, at length, in tones unmoved.

"Good morning, madam."

Mrs Beaufort bowed.

"Mr Carnegie! Mr Carnegie!" said Alice merrily, as he was leaving the room, "you have not yet told us what your character is to be. You have been so obliging as to propose several for me—now, what do you think of that of King Midas for yourself?"

"You are disposed to be witty, pretty Mistress Alice. Look at home first!" and Mr Carnegie quitted the room, bestowing upon Alice one of his most significant nods.

For nearly half an hour after Mr Carnegie's departure, Alice bent over her frame. The mysterious manner he frequently adopted when speaking to her—

a tone, hovering between menace and warning—often excited both uneasiness and displeasure in her mind. Annoyed and vexed with herself for the faithless betrayal of her promise to Captain Stuart, and busied also in revolving what possible connexion there could exist between Mr Carnegie and her family, that might account for his knowledge of her past history, Alice worked on in moody silence. When, at length, she raised her head, she found that, during her reverie, the room had been deserted by all except Mr Somerton, who still sat reading.

"You do not appear to like the character I have chosen, Mr Somerton, for the Denbridge ball—*your* ball, as I call it!" at length, said Alice, in a tone of slight pique, after considering for some time how she could commence a conversation.

"I think that the costume will be very magnificent, and cannot fail to be becoming to you ——"

"But, notwithstanding, you do not like it! Why do you use so much ceremony with me, Mr Somerton? If you do not approve of the character, say so without scruple, and I will not assume it: you know, that as the ball is under your patronage, you have a right to be consulted on its details!" exclaimed Alice,

with peevish impetuosity; for her temper had been severely tried during the morning.

Mr Somerton looked up from his book: presently he rose, and approached the couch on which Miss Berners sat. She smiled coquettishly; but Mr Somerton did not take the vacant place by her side.

"Then if you wish for my fiat, as master of the ceremonies, Miss Berners, I say, wear your gorgeous Eastern costume. Doubtlessly, yours will be the most picturesque dress in the room!" replied he, in his usual unembarrassed tones.

Alice slightly frowned. She observed that Mr Somerton avoided giving his opinion, save in general terms.

"There will be many splendid dresses to-morrow evening, I have no doubt!" retorted she, too angry to volunteer further details respecting her own costume. "Do you not think, that it is very foolish of Mrs Beaufort to take Margaret Desmond with her? The poor girl will sit down during the whole evening: for it is inflicting too onerous a duty, to expect that you can find partners for Mrs Beaufort's *dame de compagnie!* I fear Mr Carnegie's officious interference will occasion poor Margaret a great deal of

annoyance!" added Miss Berners, after a short interval, speaking in compassionate tones.

"I do not see any reason why Miss Desmond should be annoyed in the way you mention: though, as you predict, I think it possible that I may be hardly treated. Miss Desmond's graceful manners, and pretty face, are sure to bring multitudes of petitioners for the privilege of an introduction; so that, in the impartial discharge of my grave duties, I shall perhaps be required to forego the pleasure of dancing with her myself!" replied Mr Somerton, quietly, with a smile.

"Mr Somerton's admirable qualities daily display themselves!" exclaimed Alice, satirically, now fairly provoked beyond restraint. "I had often heard him quoted as a model landlord; though, I confess, I never understood that he carried his interest in his tenantry so far, as to introduce their daughters at county balls!"

Mr Somerton looked at her, but made no reply. Miss Berners then rose, and impetuously plunging her needle into the glowing rosebud she was embroidering, quitted the room.

In the hall Alice met Captain Stuart; who gazed on her flushed cheek and sparkling eye with surprise.

As she hastily attempted to pass, without speaking, he gently took her hand. In his presence Alice felt her indignation fade away, for she knew its cause was unjustifiable; and deep shame took possession of her, as she encountered his clear inquiring eyes.

"Alice, dearest, what has agitated you thus? Why did you not keep your promise, and meet me?" asked he, gravely.

"I have been detained. Do not keep me, Cuthbert: indeed, I cannot explain now! I will tell you all another time!" exclaimed Alice, excitedly; then disengaging her hand she sprang from him, and bounded up stairs.

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs Beaufort's dinner-party on the day of Mr Carnegie's visit was enlivened by no additional guests; the evening consequently dragged heavily along: everybody appeared pre-occupied and absorbed in their own meditations; till Margaret began to comprehend that it was possible to be dull even when surrounded by the beautiful glittering lights and costly furniture which had so charmed her on her first introduction to Mrs Beaufort's saloon.

Alice looked restless and flushed, flitting from group to group, with an anxiety to make herself agreeable, and to talk and be conversed with, strangely at variance with the usual haughty languor of her deportment when displeased, or wearied, with the company of those she was for the moment associating with. Mr Somerton was silent and reserved. Margaret saw

that he evidently felt and resented her conduct, as he appeared studiously to avoid addressing her.

She thought of their pleasant conversation of the preceding evening, and a feeling of indescribable sadness filled her heart; then, as she sat unnoticed and disregarded, she pondered on the singular discrepancy between Mr Somerton's words to herself, and his statements respecting her volunteered to others. Did he believe in the reality of her betrothment to George Compton? And if so, what was there now in her outward circumstances to shake his conviction, or to efface the impression confirmed by meeting her twice walking tête-à-tête with Mr Compton —once, Margaret remembered too, with feelings of extreme confusion, after dusk. Alice also had stated that Mr Somerton alluded to her engagement as a fortunate event;—one to which in the ordinary course of things she could scarcely have aspired; and he now met her at Methwold in the position of Mrs Beaufort's humble companion,—a personage bound to receive submissively every mortification heaped upon her by her employer. Did not Mrs Beaufort's manner also plainly show that her companion's presence in the drawing-room was merely tolerated, by the marked distinction between the nonchalant treatment she

received at her hands and the gracious suavity of her demeanour manifested towards her other guests —Lilian Grant included? As may be supposed, these depressing reflections did not add much to the brilliancy or animation of our heroine's appearance; nor were her feelings greatly exhilarated, when, just before the party separated, Alice approached, and whispered in her ear,—

"Really, Margaret, your face during the last half-hour has worn the most lamentable expression. I wonder whether Mr Compton has been sitting with a like rueful countenance to-night? Leonard Somerton and myself have been speculating upon, and trying to account for, your melancholy: we have been excessively amused!"

The evening altogether had been so irksome to Margaret, that she experienced a pleasure hitherto unknown, in following Mrs Beaufort from the drawing-room when the latter retired for the night.

At the door of her room, Mrs Beaufort paused, and bade Margaret retire to her own apartment for a quarter of an hour, and then return to her again. More and more mystified, Margaret obeyed, wondering what this nightly ceremony meant. Exactly at the time specified she returned, and in the boudoir found

Cartaret, who informed her that Mrs Beaufort was still engaged, but would very speedily require her presence. There was always a familiarity in Cartaret's deportment which Margaret disliked excessively; she therefore invariably received her communications in silence, though she often thought the former looked as if she would like to be questioned.

It fortunately happened that the boudoir, where Margaret had so frequently to await her audiences, was plentifully furnished with books; one of these therefore she now took up. Cartaret lingered for some time about, dressing up the bouquets, trimming the lamp, and dusting the vases; all, as it struck Margaret, with the evident intent of affording herself a plausible pretext for remaining in the room. At length she took her departure; then, amid the stillness which ensued, Margaret's quick ear detected the sound of voices in the rooms beyond, apparently in high altercation. A door was violently slammed to, and for a few minutes every thing was silent. Again the angry voices approached; and so near did they now sound, that Margaret felt assured the speakers had entered the chamber next to her.

She listened with intense interest: soon she recognised Mr Braddyll's voice, but his enunciation was

so constrained and rapid that she could not catch the import of his words. The conversation then subsided into a low murmur: so it continued for some time. Then the words, "I will not!" were angrily and emphatically uttered by a voice which Margaret recognised as Mrs Beaufort's. Another tremendous concussion of a door shook the china ornaments in the boudoir; then the one opening into the latter from the inner apartment was no less roughly thrown open.

Margaret sprang up in affright; for Mr Braddyll, as she expected, entered. His face was exceedingly red, and his demeanour altogether testifying how great must have been his recent excitement. He hesitated a moment whether to advance, when he perceived her. An expression, which instinctively made Margaret shudder, lighted his eye; then he approached, and before she was aware of his intention, took her hand and gazed earnestly into her face. Margaret indignantly averted her head, and vainly essayed to withdraw her hand, which Mr Braddyll retained with iron grasp within his own.

"Mr Braddyll, release my hand! I was desired by Mrs Beaufort to await her summons here. Does

she not wish me to go to her immediately?" asked Margaret, now beginning to be seriously alarmed at the excitement of Mr Braddyll's manner.

"Margaret! will you listen to me? Shall I render you totally independent of that proud, hateful woman?" asked Mr Braddyll in low, thick tones, pressing her hand to his lips.

Swiftly she snatched it from his grasp: a deep blush suffused her face and neck, as she retreated a step, and proudly waved him back.

"Mr Braddyll, what means this your strange language and manner to me to-night? I wish to be alone. Leave me! I will listen to nothing you have to say—nothing, I tell you!" exclaimed Margaret, haughtily.

"Yet would I do you infinite service, Margaret. That angry frown of disdainful incredulity ill becomes a face divine and heavenly as yours: it would better suit Mrs Beaufort's imperious brow. Margaret, your position here is more perilous than you imagine: say, that you will be guided by my advice!" said Mr Braddyll, fixing a gaze of admiration on Margaret's face.

She saw it not, however, for she had turned away,

and her eyes were bent on a book open before her on the table. Mr Braddyll came and stood beside her: he repeated his question.

"When I came to reside at Methwold Abbey, I resolved to act in all things under the advice and guidance of Mrs Beaufort: that resolution I see no reason to recall," replied she, coldly.

An angry frown swept over Mr Braddyll's brow. He stood silently by the table for some minutes.

"Margaret, you will repent this infatuation some day. Learn! proud as you are, that it was I who brought you here ———."

Mr Braddyll paused; for Margaret turned and confronted him with an air of bewildered astonishment. The words, "It was I who brought you here," seemed to resound in her ears. Another glance at Mr Braddyll's flushed face and excited appearance made her recoil in disgust, and almost smile at her credulity in heeding the words of a man evidently half inebriated—at least, thus only could Margaret account for the extraordinary wildness of his language and manner. Alarmed now beyond measure, Margaret meditated on the expediency of terminating an interview so embarrassing and degrading, by a flight

back to her own room; when Mrs Beaufort's welcome summons from the adjoining apartment afforded her unspeakable relief. She sprang towards the door with an energy not a little accelerated by fear.

"One word, Margaret,—only one more word, before you go. Do you hate me?" exclaimed Mr Braddyll hastily, seeking to arrest her flight by catching hold of the skirt of her dress.

The fragile muslin tore in his grasp.

"See, what you have done, Mr Braddyll!" exclaimed Margaret, her eyes sparkling with indignation as she gathered up and displayed the wide rent. "I do not choose to answer your question. I shall assuredly appeal to Mrs Beaufort; who, I am convinced, will never allow any one under her roof to be so insulted with impunity!" and without vouchsafing another glance, Margaret haughtily passed into the adjoining room, and closed the door after her.

Mrs Beaufort sat at the table in her own private room. Not the slightest trace of her recent altercation with Mark Braddyll was perceptible in her deportment: all was calm and placid as possible. A faint smile parted her lips as she gazed on Margaret's burning cheeks.

"You have just had an interview with Mr Braddyll, I suppose, Margaret?" said she, inquiringly.

Margaret's indignation was now too thoroughly roused, for the awe she habitually felt in Mrs Beaufort's presence to check her narrative; she therefore related all that had passed between herself and Mr Braddyll. Mrs Beaufort's reply, nevertheless, was destined to surprise her as much as the conduct of which she so justly complained.

"Mr Braddyll has certainly been rather premature in offering his attentions, Margaret. You must, however, excuse him, in consideration of his Italian descent, and that impetuous temperament, which, once smitten with the charms of a pretty girl, like yourself, knows not repose until its passion stands confessed," replied Mrs Beaufort, calmly. "In a few minutes, Margaret, I shall request you to read to me," added she, after a slight pause, pointing to a large volume lying open at the opposite end of the table.

Margaret felt confounded at the nonchalant manner in which Mrs Beaufort received her communication. It never once occurred to her that Mr Braddyll's effusions were other than the result of

an accidental fit of intemperance; of which he probably would be as much ashamed on the following morning, if he remembered his misconduct, as she could wish him to be. She was musing on the many mysteries which her few days' sojourn at Methwold unfolded, when her eye was attracted by a small miniature, lying in an open drawer, against which she had been unconsciously standing for some moments.

It was the portrait of a gentleman: a foreigner, as Margaret at first sight concluded, from the black, curling beard, whiskers, and moustache, which gave a haughty, sinister expression to the face. The features were small, and singularly handsome; the eyes dark, shaded by eyebrows slightly curved, of extraordinary thickness, and black as jet. At the foot of the miniature, the words "Gasparo Marescotti" were embroidered in threads of gold, on a lock of shining hair. Margaret's eyes were riveted on the pale, beautiful face; when, with a suddenness which startled her violently, Mrs Beaufort rose, closed the drawer, and motioned to her to take her place, and begin to read. Mrs Beaufort then threw herself back in her chair; and Margaret perceiving

that she had not only a very attentive auditor, but also a very critical one, exerted herself earnestly to please.

She had read for upwards of a quarter of an hour, when a loud piercing shriek rang round the room. Another and another followed; each fainter, and apparently more distant. Next came a peal of hysterical laughter, dying away in tremulous murmurs. Unutterably appalled, Margaret closed the book; nor was her fear diminished when, turning, she perceived that every trace of colour had left Mrs Beaufort's cheeks and lips, while drops of agony glistened on her brow.

Shocked and terrified beyond measure, Margaret glanced round the room for water. Seeing none, she hastened towards the bell, to summon Cartaret, as Mrs Beaufort's indisposition appeared to increase.

"No, no!—the glass on the cabinet, Margaret," gasped Mrs Beaufort; then the words, "my God!" followed by a few sentences, rapidly murmured, though unintelligible to Margaret, escaped her pallid lips.

The glass contained a dark-coloured fluid, of a strong aromatic odour, which Mrs Beaufort eagerly

swallowed; and then covered her face with her hands. Margaret perceived the tremulous movement of her slender fingers as they rested on her brow. After a few minutes Mrs Beaufort rose; and, pointing towards the door, signed to Margaret to leave her. At first Margaret hesitated to obey this command; but, in Mrs Beaufort's case, she knew not whether sympathy would be welcomed or resented.

Silently, therefore, she quitted the room; and, with beating heart, hurrying along the galleries, soon gained her own chamber; where, without permitting herself a single instant to reflect on the strange events of the evening, she immediately commenced her *toilette de nuit*, with the feeling that her bed would be her safest refuge. Unnerved, and starting at every sound, Margaret soon attained this fancied bourne: drowsiness, that invariable and merciful antidote to great excitement or grief, gradually stole over her, and in a short time after she laid her head on her pillow, Margaret slept.

Her slumber might have lasted some two hours, when she was awakened by a slight noise in the room. She listened attentively; but nothing again stirred. In her haste to gain her bed, Margaret had

forgotten to draw the window-curtains close together, as was her usual habit; and through a wide gap between them, the moonbeams poured into the room, shining full upon her bed, and glancing on the brass ornaments of a huge oak cabinet, looking gloomy and shadowy in the uncertain light.

After the lapse of a few minutes, Margaret's attention was again arrested by a slight, cautious movement in the room, and vainly did she strive to quell the throbbing of her heart. The heavy tapestry hangings of the bed presently shook slightly; another pause:— then the curtain nearest to the tester of the bed was gently withdrawn, and a pale face, shaded by tresses of golden coloured hair, bent over her. A pair of lustrous, melancholy eyes, shining with clear steadfast radiance, beamed upon her; while she lay trembling and spell-bound beneath their gaze. The moonbeams played round the lady's white transparent figure, which appeared momentarily to interpose itself, and eclipse their brightness, like a vapoury cloud passing over the sun's disc. In a few minutes the bed-curtain noiselessly glided back to its place: the phantom stood for a moment or two at the foot of the bed, gazing earnestly upon her, and then vanished.

Margaret, shudderingly hid her face. She felt that the unhallowed gaze of the Lady Mabel—the mysterious apparition of the picture gallery—had been upon her.

END OF VOLUME I.

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY OLIVER AND BOYD.

November 1851.

A

CATALOGUE OF BOOKS

IN

Various Branches of Literature,

PUBLISHED BY

SMITH, ELDER AND CO.,

65, CORNHILL, LONDON.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
New Publications . . .	1	Illustrated Scientific Works .	12
Works of Mr. Ruskin . .	4	Oriental and Colonial . .	13
„ Currer Bell . .	7	Educational	14
„ Leigh Hunt . .	8	Religious	15
Miscellaneous	9	Books for the Blind . .	16
Works of Practical Information	11		

Preparing for Publication.

I.

A NOVEL. By W. M. THACKERAY, Esq., Author of "Pendennis," "Vanity Fair," &c. In Three Volumes.

(*In January.*)

II.

THE PRESENT STATE OF PARTIES. A Series of Etchings. With Descriptions. By RICHARD DOYLE, Esq.

III.

WOMEN OF CHRISTIANITY, EXEMPLARY FOR PIETY AND CHARITY. By Miss JULIA KAVANAGH, Author of "Woman in France," "Nathalie," &c. 1 vol. post 8vo. With Portraits. Price 12s. cloth.

(Nearly ready.)

IV.

MEMOIRS OF THE LATE EMPEROR OF CHINA, AND THE COURT OF PEKIN. By the late Rev. Dr. GUTZLAFF. 1 vol. post 8vo.

(Just ready.)

V.

SUWAROW AND HIS LAST CAMPAIGN. By the late Major MACREADY. 1 vol. post 8vo, 10s. cloth.

(Just published.)

VI.

PICTURES OF LIFE IN MEXICO. By R. H. MASON, Esq. 2 vols. post 8vo, with Etchings.

(Nearly ready.)

VII.

THE FAIR CAREW; OR, HUSBANDS AND WIVES. 3 vols. post 8vo.

(Just published.)

VIII.

TWO FAMILIES OF CHAPELTON. By the Author of "Rose Douglas." 2 vols. post 8vo.

(Nearly ready.)

IX.

AGATHA BEAUFORT; OR, FAMILY PRIDE. By the Author of "Pique." 3 vols. post 8vo.

(Just ready.)

FLORENCE SACKVILLE; or, Self-Dependence. By Mrs. Burbury. 3 vols. post 8vo.

"This is a first novel,—we hope it will not be the last by its author. Mrs. Burbury possesses a clear appreciation of humour and pathos, a firm hand in noting down the boundary lines and salient features of character, and a constancy to the leading plan and purpose of her story. The story of poor Milly —the pathos of which is fearful—would alone justify us in placing Mrs. Burbury high among modern novelists."—*Athenæum.*

"The most promising novel we have met with for some time. It is an extremely careful, skilful piece of writing, containing several sketches of character, finished and truthful in a high degree; and the spirit in which it is written is as much to be approved as its cleverness. We strongly commend this novel to favourable attention."—*Examiner.*

"Mrs. Burbury is very happy in the mode in which she calls the self-dependent character into action, and the occasion on which its strength is assailed."—*Literary Gazette.*

"Mrs. Burbury possesses a flowing and racy style, an observant eye for character, a ready faculty of invention, and earnestness of design."—*Atlas.*

"Florence is a Daguerreotype of the liveliest stamp."—*Globe.*

GOLDEN DREAMS AND WAKING REALITIES; being the Adventures of a Gold-Seeker in California and the Pacific. By William Shaw. Post 8vo, 9*s.* cloth.

"The title of this book is not inaptly chosen. The story is told plainly, forcibly, and not without a pithy, natural eloquence, while the author's candour seems to vouch for the honest truth of his statement."—*Atlas.*

"Mr. Shaw suffered and saw suffering such as in fiction would seem unnatural; his career was one continued series of hardship, privation, and labour, with frequent danger and risk of life."—*Spectator.*

"This book is most excellent: its three hundred and sixteen pages of truth have humour and incident enough for the thousand pages of a three-volume novel."—*Examiner.*

"From the first page to the last, Mr. Shaw's eventful record is full of incident and interest."—*Blackwood's Magazine.*

"One of the most interesting and best written books that we have seen on California."—*Athenæum.*

Works of Mr. Ruskin.

I.

THE STONES OF VENICE. Volume the First. THE FOUNDATIONS.

With Twenty-One Plates and numerous Woodcuts. Imperial 8vo, 2*l.* 2*s.* in embossed cloth. with top edge gilt.

"The book before us contains Mr. Ruskin's theory and doctrine of the elements of architecture, applied to the various points of practical building. Throughout is manifest the great aim of inculcating, by every possible form of precept and example, the absolute necessity of preserving an unfailing correspondence between the destinations of buildings, and their forms and decorations. Mr. Ruskin's book cannot be read by any one without improvement to his moral sense and mental discipline. The book has an indestructible value. It tells us the truth on much where it greatly imports us to be informed. The eloquence of the book is extraordinary."—*Examiner.*

"At once popular and profound, this book will be gratefully hailed by a circle of readers even larger than Mr. Ruskin has found for his previous works. He has so written as to catch the ear of all kinds of persons."—*Literary Gazette.*

"The reputation which Mr. Ruskin has earned by his former works will probably receive a great accession of lustre from 'The Stones of Venice.' This work, as we had a right to expect from the age and evidently growing powers of the author, may be justly described as his most valuable performance, and fitted to become the most popular of all his productions."—*British Quarterly Review.*

"Mr. Ruskin has seized on the great principle that all art is the expression of man's delight in God's work. This is his clue through the universe; holding fast by that, he can never get far wrong. His pursuit of truth is as admirable for its clearsightedness as it is for its honesty."—*Eclectic Review.*

"We adjudge this to be an excellent book, and a valuable assistance, if studied with caution, to students of art. The matter is weighty and suggestive; the style, both forcible and beautiful; the lucid order of the composition, admirable."—*Architectural Quarterly Review.*

II.

THE SEVEN LAMPS OF ARCHITECTURE.

With Fourteen Etchings by the Author. Imp. 8vo, 1*l.* 1*s.*

"By the 'Seven Lamps of Architecture,' we understand Mr. Ruskin to mean the seven fundamental and cardinal laws, the observance of and obedience to which are indispensable to the architect who would deserve the name. The politician, the moralist, the divine, will find in it ample store of instructive matter, as well as the artist."—*Examiner.*

Works of Mr. Ruskin.

III.

MODERN PAINTERS. Imperial 8vo. Vol. I., *Fifth Edition*, 18*s*. cloth. Vol. II., *Third Edition*, 10*s*. 6*d*. cloth.

"Mr. Ruskin's work will send the painter more than ever to the study of nature; will train men who have always been delighted spectators of nature, to be also attentive observers. Our critics will learn to admire, and mere admirers will learn how to criticise: thus a public will be educated. It is the object of Mr. Ruskin, in his first volume of 'Modern Painters,' to shew what the artist has to do in his imitation of nature. In his second volume, he explains the theory of the beautiful."—*Blackwood's Magazine.*

IV.

PRE-RAPHAELITISM. 8vo, 2*s*. sewed.

"We wish that this pamphlet might be largely read by our art-patrons, and studied by our art-critics. There is much to be collected from it which it is very important to remember."—*Guardian.*

V.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN RIVER; OR, THE BLACK BROTHERS. With 22 Illustrations by RICHARD DOYLE. 2*s*. 6*d*.

"This little fairy tale is by a master-hand. The story has a charming moral, and the writing is so excellent, that it would be hard to say which it will give most pleasure to, the very wise man or the very simple child."—*Examiner.*

"Full of exquisite little pictures, with an under-current of humour floating through, and bearing a moral which can never be repeated too often."—*Fraser's Magazine.*

VI.

NOTES on the CONSTRUCTION OF SHEEP-FOLDS. 8vo, 1*s*.

"A pamphlet on the doctrine and discipline of the Church of Christ."—*Britannia.*

Mr. Ruskin's Illustrations of "The Stones of Venice."

Now in course of publication, in Parts, of Folio Imperial size, 1l. 1s. each.

EXAMPLES OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF VENICE, Selected and Drawn to Measurement from the Edifices, by JOHN RUSKIN, Author of "The Stones of Venice," &c. &c.

Each Part contains Five Plates, engraved by the first artists, and as nearly as possible fac-similes of Mr. Ruskin's original Drawings; and a short explanatory text.

Parts One to Three are published.

Fifty India Proofs only are taken on Atlas Folio, price 2*l.* 2*s.* each Part.

Contents of Part I.

Plate

1. THE DUCAL PALACE. Twentieth Capital. *Mezzotint.*
1. ARABIAN WINDOWS, in Campo Santa Maria Mater Domini. *Mezzotint.*
3. BYZANTINE CAPITALS, from Torcello and St. Mark's. *Tinted Lithograph.*
4. CORNICE MOULDING, from a Tomb. *Tinted Lithograph.*
5. THE DUCAL PALACE. Compartments of Central Balcony. *Line Engraving.*

5B. THE DUCAL PALACE. Sections of the Southern Balcony. *Line Engraving.*

Contents of Part II.

Plate

6. SAINT MARK'S. Southern Portico. *Mezzotint.*
7. SAINT MARK'S. Details of the Lily Capitals. *Line Engraving.*
8. BYZANTINE RUIN, in Rio di Ca' Foscari. *Line Engraving.*
6. BYZANTINE RUIN, in Rio di Ca' Foscari. *Coloured Lithograph.*
10. PALACE IN RIO DI CA' FOSCARI. Conjectural Restoration. *Line Engraving.*

Contents of Part III.

Plate.

11. DOOR HEADS, from Ca' Contarini, &c. *Mezzotint.*
12. DOOR HEADS. *Coloured Lithograph.*
13. DOOR HEADS. *Line Engraving.*
14. CA' BERNARDO MOCENIGO. Capital of Window Shafts. *Tinted Lithograph.*
15. THE DUCAL PALACE. Renaissance Capitals of the Loggia. *Tinted Lithograph.*

Works of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell.

I.

JANE EYRE: an Autobiography. By CURRER BELL. *Fourth Edition*, post 8vo, 6*s*. cloth.

"'Jane Eyre' is a remarkable production. Freshness and originality, truth and passion, singular felicity in the description of natural scenery and in the analyzation of human thought, enable this tale to stand boldly out from the mass, and to assume its own place in the bright field of romantic literature. We could not but be struck with the raciness and ability of the work, by the independent sway of a thoroughly original and unworn pen, by the masculine current of noble thoughts, and the unflinching dissection of the dark yet truthful character."—*Times*.

II.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS and AGNES GREY; with a Selection of the Literary Remains of ELLIS and ACTON BELL, and a Biographical Notice of both Authors by CURRER BELL. Crown 8vo, 6*s*. cloth.

"'Wuthering Heights' bears the stamp of a profoundly individual, strong, and passionate mind. This memoir is one of the most touching chapters in literary biography."—*Nonconformist*.

III.

SHIRLEY; a Tale. By CURRER BELL. 3 vols. post 8vo, 1*l*. 11*s*. 6*d*. cloth.

"'Shirley' is an admirable book; totally free from cant and affectation; genuine English in the independence and uprightness of the tone of thought, in the purity of heart and feeling which pervade it, in the masculine vigour of its conception of character, and in style and diction. It is a tale of passion and character, and a veritable triumph of psychology."—*Morning Chronicle*.

"'Shirley' is very clever. The faculty of graphic description, strong imagination, fervid and masculine diction, analytic skill, all are visible. Gems of rare thought and glorious passion shine here and there throughout the volumes."—*Times*.

IV.

POEMS. By CURRER, ELLIS, and ACTON BELL. Fcap. 8vo, 4*s*. cloth.

"A volume of poems which will not detract from the fame of the authors. The poems bearing the signature of Currer Bell exhibit the impress of a matured intellect and masterly hand."—*Morning Herald*.

Works of Mr. Leigh Hunt.

I.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF LEIGH HUNT: with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries. 3 vols. post 8vo, with Portraits, 1l. 11s. 6d. cloth.

"These volumes contain a personal recollection of the literature and politics, as well as some of the most remarkable literary men and politicians, of the last fifty years. The reminiscences are varied by sketches of manners during the same period, and by critical remarks on various topics. They are also extended by boyish recollection, family tradition, and contemporary reading; so that we have a sort of social picture of almost a century, with its fluctuations of public fortune and its changes of fashions, manners, and opinions."—Spectator.

II.

THE TOWN: its Memorable Characters and Events. 2 vols. post 8vo, with 45 Illustrations, 1l. 4s. cloth.

"We will allow no higher enjoyment for a rational Englishman than to stroll leisurely through this marvellous town arm-in-arm with Mr. Leigh Hunt. He gives us the outpourings of a mind enriched with the most agreeable knowledge."—Times.

III.

MEN, WOMEN, AND BOOKS. 2 vols. post 8vo, with Portrait, 1l. 1s. cloth.

"A book for a parlour-window, for a summer's eve, for a warm fireside, for a half-hour's leisure, for a whole day's luxury; in any and every possible shape a charming companion."—Westminster Review.

IV.

TABLE TALK. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 7s.

"Precisely the book we would take as a companion on the green lane walk; and to the drawing-room table it will prove a most esteemed acquisition."—Globe.

V.

IMAGINATION AND FANCY. Cloth, gilt edges, 10s. 6d.; boards, 9s.

VI.

WIT AND HUMOUR. Cloth, gilt edges, 10s. 6d.; boards, 9s.

Miscellaneous.

WOMAN IN FRANCE DURING THE 18TH CENTURY. By JULIA KAVANAGH. 2 vols. post 8vo, with Eight Portraits. 1*l.* 4*s.* cloth.

"Miss Kavanagh has undertaken a delicate task, and she has performed it on the whole with discretion and judgment. Her volumes may lie on any drawing-room table without scandal, and may be read by all but her youngest countrywomen without risk."—*Quarterly Review.*

"Which among us will be ever tired of reading about the women of France, especially when they are marshalled so agreeably and discreetly as in the pages before us?"—*Athenæum.*

"The subject is handled with much delicacy and tact, and the book shews often an original tone of remark, and always a graceful and becoming one."—*Examiner.*

"Miss Kavanagh has acquitted herself with artist-like skill; her picture of the manners of a most remarkable epoch is drawn with boldness, precision, and delicacy."—*Globe.*

"Delightful volumes, not only of immense interest, but of permanent value."—*Britannia.*

ROSE DOUGLAS; OR, SKETCHES OF A COUNTRY PARISH: being the Autobiography of a Scotch Minister's Daughter. 2 vols. post 8vo, 1*l.* 1*s.* cloth.

"Among domestic tales, 'Rose Douglas' may take the place which Wordsworth's 'Lucy' occupies among domestic poems. A more attractive book of its placid order we do not often meet; we commend this narrative as one sure to interest, to retain, and to satisfy the heart."—*Athenæum.*

"'Rose Douglas' is what it professes to be. In the minute, homely, but delicate painting of the characters of the parish, we are instinctively reminded of the quiet, genuine humour of Galt."—*Britannia.*

"It is an interesting and instructive book, and has a character of truthfulness and reality about it. The author writes from experience, and produces a picture which is singularly defined and clear."—*Guardian.*

A TRIP TO MEXICO; OR, RECOLLECTIONS OF A TEN MONTHS' RAMBLE IN 1849-50. By a Barrister. Post 8vo, 9*s.* cloth.

"A very pleasant volume, which conveys a vivid impression of Mexican life and manners."—*Critic.*

"An agreeable, amusing, and to some extent instructive volume."—*Literary Gazette.*

"We are pleased with the writer's vivacity and candour, and can recommend the work as certain to afford instruction and entertainment."—*Globe.*

CONVERSATIONS OF GOETHE WITH ECKERMANN. Translated from the German by JOHN OXENFORD. 2 vols. post 8vo, 1*l.* 4*s.* cloth.

"These conversations present a distinct and truthful image of Goethe's mind during the last ten years of his life. And never was his judgment more clear and correct than in his closing years. The time spent on the perusal of this book will be usefully and agreeably employed. Mr. Oxenford's translation is as exact and faithful as it is elegant."—*Spectator.*

"These conversations contain a rich vein of wise thoughts upon a great variety of subjects."—*Westminster Review.*

A GLANCE AT REVOLUTIONISED ITALY. By CHARLES MACFARLANE. 2 vols. post 8vo, price 1*l.* 1*s.* cloth.

"These two amusing and unpretending volumes give more insight into the present state of the Italian peninsula than can be collected from all the voluminous speeches, pamphlets, reports, and letters with which the press has been inundated."—*Quarterly Review.*

"These volumes afford the fairest view yet given to the public of Italian affairs during the last few eventful months."—*Britannia.*

THE KICKLEBURYS ON THE RHINE. A new Picture-Book, drawn and written by Mr. M. A. TITMARSH. Second Edition, with a Preface entitled "An Essay on Thunder and Small Beer." 5*s.* plain, 7*s.* 6*d.* coloured.

ROWCROFT'S TALES OF THE COLONIES; OR, THE ADVENTURES OF AN EMIGRANT. *Sixth Edition*, fcap. 8vo, 6*s.*

"'Tales of the Colonies' is an able and interesting book. The author has the first great requisite in fiction—a knowledge of the life he undertakes to describe; and his matter is solid and real."—*Spectator.*

PIQUE. A Novel. 3 vols. post 8vo.

"'Pique' is a brilliant novel. There is grace and refinement everywhere."—*Critic.*

"In this clever book, the enforcement of a sound, social moral, gives energy and purpose to the exercise of the author's powers of observations and description."—*Globe.*

"The narrative is so easy, earnest, and pleasant, as to have enticed us on from chapter to chapter, with a charm which is by no means of every week's experience."—*Athenæum.*

Works of Practical Information.

THE BRITISH OFFICER; his Position, Duties, Emoluments, and Privileges: being a Digest and Compilation of the Rules, Regulations, Warrants, and Memoranda relating to the Duties, Promotion, Pay, and Allowances of the Officers in Her Majesty's Service, and in that of the Hon. East India Company; with Notices of the Military Colleges, Hospitals, &c.; By J. H. Stocqueler. 8vo, 15*s.* cloth extra.

"In writing this book Mr. Stocqueler has performed an acceptable service to the military profession. The style is clear, vigorous, and precise; and the arrangement perspicuous and systematic. The book has also a value to non-professional readers."—*Athenæum.*

SCRIVENOR'S ACCOUNT of the RAILWAYS of the UNITED KINGDOM. 8vo, 1*l.* 1*s.* cloth.

"A work embracing the entire statistics, so far as they can be gathered from authentic documents, of the railways of the United Kingdom. The financial history of each company, and its dependencies, is detailed in a well-arranged form, together with their present position, and every point of useful official information."—*Times.*

A Supplement to the above work, 8vo, uniform with the volume, 7*s.* cloth.

PIDDINGTON'S SAILOR'S HORN-BOOK OF STORMS. Second Edition, 8vo, 10*s.* 6*d.*, with Charts and Storm-Cards.

"A valuable practical work."—*Nautical Magazine.*

HUGHES on the DUTIES OF JUDGE ADVOCATES. Post 8vo, 7*s.* cloth.

KENTFIELD ON BILLIARDS. *Fourth Edition*, small folio, with 93 Diagrams, 1*l.* 11*s.* 6*d.* cloth.

Illustrated Scientific Works.

SIR J. HERSCHEL'S ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATIONS, made during the Years 1834-5-6-7-8, at the Cape of Good Hope; being the completion of a Telescopic Survey of the whole Surface of the visible Heavens, commenced in 1825. Royal 4to, with 18 Plates, 4*l.* 4*s.*

Published with the approval of the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury.

DARWIN'S GEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS; made during the Voyage of H. M. S. *Beagle*.

Part I.—ON CORAL FORMATIONS.
II.—ON THE VOLCANIC ISLANDS OF THE ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC OCEANS.
III.—ON THE GEOLOGY OF SOUTH AMERICA.

The Three Parts in 1 vol. 8vo, with Maps, Plates, and Woodcuts, 10*s.* 6*d.* cloth.

ILLUSTRATIONS of the BOTANY OF THE HIMALAYA MOUNTAINS, and of the Flora of Cashmere.

By J. FORBES ROYLE, M.D., V.P.R.S., F.L.S. & G.S., M.R.A.S.,
Professor of Materia Medica and Therapeutics, King's College.

2 vols. imp. 4to, with 100 Coloured Plates, 5*l.* 5*s.* cloth.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE ZOOLOGY OF SOUTH AFRICA. By Dr. ANDREW SMITH.

Complete in 28 royal 4to Parts, comprising 277 Plates of Quadrupeds, Birds, Reptiles, Fish, and Insects, drawn on Stone by Mr. G. H. FORD, and nearly all beautifully coloured from Nature; with Descriptions of about 600 Species.

Price 18*l.* bound in Five Quarto Volumes, cloth lettered.

Each division of the work may be purchased separately, bound in cloth, lettered, at the following proportionate prices, viz.:—

MAMMALIA	50 Plates	£3	0	0	PISCES . .	31 Plates	£2 0 0
AVES . .	114 „	7	0	0	INVERTEBRATÆ . . .	1	0 0
REPTILIA .	78 „	5	0	0			

Oriental and Colonial.

ON THE CULTURE AND COMMERCE OF COTTON IN INDIA AND ELSEWHERE; with an Account of the Experiments made by the Hon. East India Company up to the present time.

By J. Forbes Royle, M.D., F.R.S.

Late Superintendent of the Hon. E. I. Co.'s Botanic Gardens at Saharunpore, Professor of Materia Medica and Therapeutics in King's College, London.

8vo, 18*s.* cloth.

THE MOOHUMMUDAN LAW OF SALE. Selected from the Digest of the Emperor Aurungzebe, and Translated from the original Arabic; with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes.

By Neil B. E. Baillie,

Author of "The Moohummudan Law of Inheritance."

8vo, 14*s.* cloth.

"A valuable addition to juridical and even to general literature. It is the best specimen of a really good Mahommedan law book that has yet been published."—*Spectator.*

WRAY'S PRACTICAL SUGAR-PLANTER. 8vo, with numerous Illustrations, 1*l.* 1*s.*

"'The Practical Sugar-Planter is a most useful book, containing more condensed and solid general information than we have ever before found collected on the subject of which it treats. To the actual planter it will be found a most valuable work."—*Colonial Magazine.*

"Mr. Wray's work is of commanding interest. It is full of practical details, and will be an excellent guide to planters."—*Economist.*

COOPER'S INVALID'S GUIDE TO MADEIRA. Fcap. 8vo, 4*s.* cloth gilt.

"A work which may be consulted with advantage."—*Sir James Clarke on Climate.*

ROYLE'S PRODUCTIVE RESOURCES OF INDIA. Royal 8vo, 14*s.* cloth.

PORTER ON THE SUGAR-CANE. New Edit., revised, with Plates, demy 8vo, 12*s.* cloth.

Educational.

WORKS ON ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE. By B. THORPE, Esq.

I.—ANALECTA ANGLO-SAXONICA. Post 8vo, 10s. cloth.

II.—ANGLO-SAXON VERSION of APOLLONIUS OF TYRE. Post 8vo, 6s.

III.—RASK'S GRAMMAR of the ANGLO-SAXON TONGUE. 8vo, 10s.

EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF PREVENTING DESTITUTION. Preceded by a Letter to the Right Hon. LORD JOHN RUSSELL, M.P. By WILLIAM ELLIS, Author of the "Outlines of Social Economy." Post 8vo, 2s. cloth.

ELEMENTARY WORKS on SOCIAL SCIENCE. Uniform in fcap. 8vo, half-bound.

I.—PROGRESSIVE LESSONS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE. 2s. 6d.

II.—INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES. 2s.

III.—OUTLINES OF SOCIAL ECONOMY. 2s. 6d.

IV.—QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS on the Arrangements and Relations of Social Life. 2s. 6d.

V.—OUTLINES OF THE UNDERSTANDING. 2s.

"The author of these various manuals of the social sciences has the art of making clearly the abstruse points of political economy and metaphysics, and making them level to every understanding."—*Economist.*

PARENTS' CABINET of AMUSEMENT and INSTRUCTION. 6 vols. 2s. 6d. each. Each volume is complete in itself, and may be had separately.

"The little work contains just the description of reading which will be beneficial to young children."—*Quarterly Journal of Education.*

LITTLE STORIES from the PARLOUR PRINTING PRESS. By the Author of the "Parents' Cabinet."

"A very nice little book for children."—*Weekly Chronicle.*

Religious.

THE NOVITIATE; OR, THE JESUIT IN TRAINING: being a Year among the English Jesuits. By ANDREW STEINMETZ. *Third Edition*, with Memoir and Portrait, post 8vo, 6*s*. cloth.

"This is a remarkable book. It describes with a welcome minuteness, the daily, nightly, hourly occupations of the Jesuit Novitiates at Stonyhurst, their religious exercises and manners, in private and together; and depicts, with considerable acuteness and power, the conflicts of an intelligent, susceptible, honest-purposed spirit, while passing through such a process."—*British Quarterly Review.*

"If it be desirable to know what is that mode of training by which the Jesuit system prepares its novices for their duties, this is the book to inform us, for it is a chronicle of actual experience."—*Britannia.*

TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH; OR, THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A CONVERTED ATHEIST. *Third Edition*, fcap. 8vo, 4*s*. 6*d*. cloth.

"A very interesting account of the experiences of an intelligent and sincere mind on the subject of religion. We can honestly recommend the book to the notice of our readers."—*Eclectic Review.*

"The work, we trust, will obtain a wide circulation, especially amongst classes exposed to the contagion of sceptical association. Even to firm believers it is calculated to be very profitable."—*Evangelical Magazine.*

"The history of the conversion of an individual mind has never been more minutely traced; the psychological phenomena revealed have never been more curious and suggestive; and the incidents have never been described with more minute fidelity."—*Atlas.*

THE RECTORY OF VALEHEAD. By the Rev. ROBERT WILSON EVANS. *Fourteenth Edition*, 5*s*. cloth.

"Universally and cordially do we recommend this delightful volume. We believe no person could read this work, and not be the better for its pious and touching lessons."—*Literary Gazette.*

RECORDS OF A GOOD MAN'S LIFE. By the Rev. CHARLES B. TAYLER. *Ninth Edition*, fcap. 8vo, 6*s*. cloth.

THE CALCUTTA REVIEW. Published Quarterly, and received regularly by the Overland Mail. Nos. I. to XXX., 6s. each.

The articles, written by gentlemen long resident in India, connected with the Civil and Military services, the Missionary establishments, the Bar, the Church, Commerce, the Press, &c., contain, in a condensed form, an immense mass of information relating to the contemporary History and Biography of India, Eastern Ethnography, Philology, Topography, Statistics, Science, Literature, Missionary labours, Society, Manners and Customs, and a large body of original intelligence of the most authentic character.

BOOKS FOR THE USE OF THE BLIND,

Printed with a very distinct Raised Roman Letter, adapted to their Touch.

The HOLY BIBLE, in 15 vols. 4to, bound. Any volume separately:—

Vol.	£	s.	d.	Vol.	£	s.	d.
1. Genesis	0	10	0	10. Psalms	0	13	0
2. Exodus and Leviticus	0	13	0	11. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Esther	0	8	6
3. Numbers	0	9	0				
4. Deuteronomy	0	7	6				
5. Joshua, Judges, and Ruth	0	10	0	12. Isaiah	0	10	0
6. Samuel	0	11	0	13. Jeremiah and Lamentations	0	11	0
7. Kings	0	11	0				
8. Chronicles	0	11	0	14. Ezekiel	0	10	0
9. Job, Ezra, and Nehemiah	0	9	0	15. Daniel, to the end	0	11	0

The NEW TESTAMENT, complete, 4 vols. bound £2 0 0

The Four Gospels, separately:—

Matthew	0	5	6	Acts of the Apostles	0	5	6
Mark	0	4	0	Epistles to the Ephesians and Galatians	0	4	0
Luke	0	5	6				
John	0	4	6	Epistle to the Romans	0	4	0

Church of England Catechism	0	1	0	Lessons on Natural Religion	0	1	6
Church of Scotland Shorter Catechism	0	2	6	Psalms and Hymns (English version)	0	12	0
Selections from Eminent Authors	0	1	6	Morning & Evening Services	0	2	6
				History of the Bible	0	2	0
Selections of Sacred Poetry, with Tunes	0	1	0	Musical Catechism, with Tunes	0	3	6
Arithmetical Boards	0	10	6	English Grammar	0	5	0
Map of England and Wales	0	2	0	Tod's Lectures, vols. 1, 2, and 3, each	0	2	6
Ruth and James	0	2	6				
Report and Statement of Education	0	2	0	Description of London, by Chambers	0	3	0
First and Second Book of Lessons	0	1	6	Meditations on the Sacrament	0	4	0
				Scottish Songs	0	3	0
A Selection of Æsop's Fables, with Woodcuts	0	2	0	Introduction to Astronomy	0	3	6
				Alphabet, on Card	0	0	1
Psalms and Paraphrases, 2 vols. (Scotch version)	0	16	0	Types for Writing .. per Alphabet	0	3	6

LONDON: PRINTED BY STEWART AND MURRAY, OLD BAILEY.



